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INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

1

1945

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LENIN AND THE WORLD OF CULTURE

Lenin and culture has been the subject dealt with in a number of research works, memoirs and articles based on abundant documentary material. In this brief sketch I should like to introduce the reader to a few passages from Lenin typifying various aspects of his views on this question.

The great founder of the Soviet state could not and did not stand aside from any sphere of the spiritual activity and cultural development of the people.

Lenin considered that in building up a new culture it was necessary to start with a critical assimilation of the cultural heritage of the past. He called upon the young people to acquire "an exact knowledge of the culture created by the whole development of mankind". The culture which is growing up in the Soviet state is "the result of the natural development of those stores of knowledge which mankind had accumulated..."

The Soviet people had to overcome their cultural backwardness, that is why Lenin paid so much attention to the question of the struggle for literacy, a struggle which laid the foundations for the further economic and cultural growth of the country.

"We must try to make the ability to read and write serve the purpose of raising the level of culture, try to make the peasant learn to read and write for the purpose of improving his farm and his state."

Is the rapid cultural progress of that state possible? Lenin answered in the affirmative. For "nowhere are the masses of the people so interested in real culture as in our country, nowhere are the problems of culture presented so profoundly and so consistently as in our country."

In Klara Zetkin's memoirs there is a record of her conversation with Lenin about art. Zetkin had a habit of writing down conversations she had had either the same evening, or the next morning, or at night; she had a splendid memory and we can be sure that her notes preserve for us what Lenin actually said. In her notes she quotes Lenin's actual words: "Art belongs to the people. It should strike its deepest roots down into the very heart of the masses. It should unite and elevate the feelings, thoughts and will of the masses. It should awaken and develop latent artistic talent among them."

Lenin's interpretation of the popular nature and the humanitarian aims of art must be borne in mind when considering his appreciation of classical music, in particular his deep understanding of Beethoven and his lively interest in the forms of art more accessible to the masses.

In Gorky's memoirs we find this passage: "One evening, in Moscow, at Catherine Peshkova's flat, Lenin sat listening to Beethoven's sonatas. 'I know nothing greater than the "Apassionata", I could listen to it every day,' he said. 'It's glorious, super-human music. And perhaps it's a bit naive and childish of me, but I always think proudly: look what amazing things people can do!'"

Nadezhda Krupskaya says that Lenin often asked Inessa Armand, his great friend and a fine musician, to play Beethoven's Sonata "Pathétique" for him.

When Lenin was living in Paris he was fond of visiting little theatres where the "chansonniers" commented on current events in witty couplets.

He loved to listen to Montegus singing the song, "We Salute You, Soldiers of the Seventeenth!" These soldiers had refused to fire at strikers. Lenin himself at this time used to be always humming a song that he learned from the charwoman who came to do his flat:

*"Vous avez pris Alsace et Lorraine,
Mais malgré vous nous resterons Français.
Vous avez pu germaniser nos plaines,
Mais notre cœur—vous ne l'aurez jamais!"*

("You have taken Alsace and Lorraine, but still we are French. You may germanize our fields, but never our hearts!")

As for literature, in addition to Lenin's classic writings on Tolstoy, there is an enormous amount of material on literature to be found scattered throughout his works.

Lenin had an excellent knowledge of literature, a knowledge not confined to Russian authors alone. He was familiar with literature in many languages, including the works of the ancients.

Before the October Revolution, when Lenin frequently had to resort to Aesopian language to outwit the tsarist censors, he had recourse to quotations from the works of the Russian satirists (Saltykov-Shchedrin, Gogol, Griboyedov, Krylov). A most interesting book, "Lenin's Literary Quotations," gives some very valuable data on these references. Most of them are taken from Saltykov-Shchedrin. Lenin introduces them into his polemics with political opponents, whom he labels with the names of various characters from Saltykov's works. Lenin had a brilliant memory, and he often introduced quotations without looking them up in the original. This can be seen from the fact that sometimes the position of words is interchanged.

Alexander Pushkin was one of Lenin's favourite writers. Nadezhda Krupskaya declared that "he (Lenin) loved Pushkin best of all." In another place, recounting a visit Lenin paid to the students of the Higher Art and Technical Studios, Krupskaya writes that when Lenin asked: "What do you read? Do you read Pushkin?"—one of the students answered that they read Mayakovsky, upon which Lenin remarked: "In my opinion Pushkin is better." This does not imply that Lenin meant to disparage Mayakovsky; it is well known how keenly he appreciated Mayakovsky's satiric verse directed against the bureaucrats.

Lenin's analysis of the most complex aspects of the art of Leo Tolstoy remains unsurpassed. He wrote: "The contradictions in Tolstoy's works, views and teachings are glaring indeed. On the one hand we have the brilliant artist who has produced not only incomparable pictures of Russian life, but also first-class works of world literature. On the other hand we have a country squire acting the fool in Christ. On the one hand we have a remarkably powerful, direct and sincere protest against social lies and falsehood, while on the other, the 'Tolstoyan,' i.e. the washed-out, hysterical, cry-baby known as the Russian intellectual, who beats his breast and cries: I am vile, I am wretched, but I am morally perfecting myself: I do not eat meat anymore and now feed only on rice patties."

Some brilliant pages in Gorky's memoirs help us to understand Lenin's attitude towards Tolstoy.

"Once I dropped in on him," writes Gorky, "and there on the table I see a volume of 'War and Peace'. 'Yes, Tolstoy. I wanted to read over the part about the hunt. And then I remembered that I had to write to a comrade. I can't find a moment for reading. Only last night I read your book about Tolstoy.' Smiling, his eyes wrinkled at the corners, he stretched out with obvious enjoyment in his armchair, and, dropping his voice, continued rapidly: 'What a colossus, eh? What an absolute superman! There's an artist for you! And do you know what is still more amazing about him? His mouzhik's way of speaking and thinking, the real mouzhik in him. Before this count there wasn't a genuine peasant in literature.' Then screwing up his eyes and looking at me he added: 'Can you place anyone in Europe beside him?' And himself answered: 'No one!'"

Equally valuable data is to be found in Krupskaya's memoirs concerning Lenin's estimate of the great Russian thinker and writer Chernyshevsky, of whom he was very fond.

"He loved Chernyshevsky's novel 'What Is to Be Done?'¹ in spite of its naive and rather inartistic form. I was surprised to see how carefully he read this novel and noticed all the subtle touches there are in it. So far as that goes, he loved everything

about Chernyshevsky, and had two photos of him in his Siberian album (the album Lenin kept during his exile in Siberia.—H. S.) One of the photos bears the dates of the birth and death of the writer in Lenin's hand."

Lenin had a very high opinion of Herzen. In an article "In Memory of Herzen," Lenin quoted a passage from the writer about those who organized and led the revolt of December 14th, 1825, against the regime of Nikolai I: "They were real titans, pure steel from head to foot, warriors, aesthetics, going consciously to their doom in order to arouse the young generation to new life and purify the children born in the midst of slavery and oppression..." "And amongst those children," wrote Lenin, "was Herzen himself. The revolt of the Decembrists aroused and 'purified' him. In the self-owning Russia of the forties of last century he succeeded in raising himself to such heights that he became one of the greatest thinkers of his day."

"Herzen set up a free Russian press abroad—this was the great service he rendered. 'The Polar Star' upheld the traditions of the Decembrists. 'The Bell' (1857—1867) stood firmly for the emancipation of the peasants. The servile silence was broken." And finally, "in honouring Herzen we see clearly three generations, three classes, forwarding the cause of the Russian revolution. First there were the nobles and landowners, the Decembrists and Herzen. The circle of these revolutionaries was narrow, they were far removed from the people. But their cause was not lost. The Decembrists gave rise to Herzen, Herzen stirred up revolutionary agitation.

"The revolutionaries and middle-class intelligentsia of the sixties, from Chernyshevsky down to the heroes of the 'People's Will Party', caught up the struggle, broadened, strengthened and hardened it. The fighters were drawn from wider circles and their ties with the people grew closer. 'Young pilots of the coming storm,' Herzen called them; but as yet the storm itself had not broken.

"The storm came when the masses themselves were set in motion. The proletariat, the only thoroughly revolutionary class, rose at their head, and for the first time stirred the peasant millions to open revolutionary revolt. The first start of the storm was in 1905..."

Lenin considered Gorky a representative in literature of this "storm," this mass movement; and unquestionably, "the greatest representative."

It is impossible to read without emotion the pages showing Lenin's friendship for Gorky, his wise, touching solicitude for the best writer on, and champion of the Russian popular revolt.

This is how Gorky describes his first meeting with Lenin, which took place soon after Gorky finished writing his novel "Mother".

"...a bald-headed, stocky, sturdy person, speaking with a guttural roll of his "r's" and holding my hand in one of his, while

¹ The novel "What Is to Be Done" described the ideological and moral make-up of the progressive Russian intelligentsia in the sixties of last century.

with the other he wiped a forehead which might have belonged to Socrates, and he beamed affectionately at me with his strangely bright eyes. He began at once to speak about the defects of my book 'Mother'—he had read it in the manuscript which was in the possession of I. P. Ladizhnikov. I was hurrying to finish the book, I said, but did not have time to say why before Lenin with a nod of assent himself gave the explanations. Yes, I should hurry up with it, such a book is needed, for many of the workers who take part in the revolutionary movement do so unconsciously, and chaotically, and it would be very useful for them to read 'Mother'."

Thinking of drawing Gorky into the work of the literary section of the journal "The Proletarian," Lenin wrote to Anatole Lunacharsky: "That's just what I've been dreaming of doing, of making the literary and critical section of 'The Proletarian' permanent and handing it over to A. M. (Alexei Maximovich Gorki.—H. S.). But I was afraid, terribly afraid to suggest it, as I don't know the kind of work A. M. is doing, or how much he's capable of doing. If a man is engaged on a big, serious work, and if taking up his time with trifles, newspaper work and journalism is going to interfere with it, it would be stupid and criminal to disturb him and distract him. I understand and feel this very well... You're on the spot and can judge better... If you think that we won't harm A. M.'s work by harnessing him to regular party work (and what an enormous gain it will be for party work!), then try to arrange it."

M. Gorky in fact participated in the work of the newspaper "The Star" in which were published his Italian tales, which Lenin called "splendid."

Speaking of the value of Russian literature in spiritually uniting the peoples of our country, Lenin wanted everyone who called Russia his homeland to know the language of Turgenev and Tolstoy.

"...the language of Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dobrolyubov and Chernyshevsky is great and powerful. We want... the closest possible intercourse and most fraternal unity to be established among the oppressed classes of all nations inhabiting Russia without exception. And it stands to reason that we stand for every inhabitant of Russia having the opportunity to learn the great Russian tongue."

Just as he was proud of his language, Lenin was proud too of his people and his nationality.

"We are full of the feeling of national

pride, for the great Russian nation... has shown that it is capable of providing mankind with great examples of heroism in the struggle for freedom and socialism, and not only great pogroms, rows of gallows, torture chambers, great famine and great servility to priests, tsars, landlords and capitalists. We are full of the feeling of national pride, and for just this reason hate so much our past of slavery."

Lenin's ideas on patriotism and love of freedom formed the foundation of our conception of patriotism and the love of the peoples of the U. S. S. R. for their homeland. In these days of the grim struggle against Hitlerism, of the victorious conclusion of the war, Stalin described Soviet patriotism in these terms: "Soviet patriotism blends harmoniously the national traditions of the peoples and the common, vital interests of all the working people of the Soviet Union."

We have already had occasion to speak of Lenin's knowledge of classical languages; he knew modern European languages—English, German and French—no less well, and had an excellent knowledge of the literature written in these languages.

In the album he kept in Siberia, along with pictures of the family and old convict-revolutionaries, were pictures of writers, as for instance, Zola. In Lenin's works we find numerous references to the works of Goethe, Dickens, Hugo, London, Hauptmann, Barbusse, Upton Sinclair and many others.

What demands did Lenin make of the culture and literature of the future? We shall answer in his own words:

"It will be a free literature, because neither greed nor careerism, but the ideas of socialism and sympathy with the working people will recruit ever new forces into its ranks. It will be a free literature, because it will serve not the sated heroine nor the upper 'ten thousand', bored and burdened with superfluous fat, but the millions and tens of millions of working folk, who constitute the flower of the nation, its strength and its future."

In conclusion I should like to give Joseph Stalin's estimate of Lenin as a representative of science and culture, in the words he used at the reception given in the Kremlin to the workers of the universities and institutes on May 17th, 1938: "Lenin was one of the leading lights of that science... which has the boldness and resolution to break with old traditions, norms and principles when they have outlived their day and begun to act as a brake on progress; that science which is able to create new traditions, new norms and new principles."

HELEN STASSOVA

¹ In 1905 a special publishing house headed by Ivan Ladizhnikov was set up abroad which secured Gorky's author's rights.

JUST LOVE

Abridged version of a new wartime tale

Maria took off her white nurse's overall.

She turned on the tap and the water gushed out in a fine stream. Her twenty-four-hour duty was ended. Outside the windows it was still dark, but the outlines of the trees could already be traced against the barely paling background of the sky. Maria cast a friendly glance of greeting at the new day. The thought flashed through her mind that it would have been pleasant to walk home, if only it were not raining. But what if she decided to go on foot all the same, to feel the cool drops blown on her face by the playful breeze, to hear the water splashing under her feet? As a child she had loved such weather. She would run out of the house during a thunder-storm or in the heavy rain and be filled with spontaneous joy as she felt the wind tugging at her frock, and the heavy drops beating on her face and running down her loosened hair, while the pools of water seethed and bubbled, flayed by the driving rain. Naturally, there would be a scolding awaiting her when she returned: her mother would grumble incessantly about the wet shoes, the frock which was sure to shrink, or the ribbons that were absolutely ruined. But again the wind-driven rain would call her, entice her out to race recklessly about the yard, whooping, intoxicated by the cold streams beating on her face.

Maria smiled. Yes, they were all still there—her savage instincts, as her mother called them. But now she really did have to spare her shoes. Her only pair, and badly worn at that. She would have to take the tram as usual. And then to sleep, sleep, sleep! Sleep away the whole twenty-four hours!

The door opened.

"Do come, Maria, he's shouting again, he's shouting terribly!"

Maria hastily wiped her hands and again put on her overall. Impatiently she tore at the knotted belt.

"I'm awfully sorry, you must be terribly tired, but..."

"Don't talk rubbish, Raya; come along."

A long corridor with a dark-red runner underfoot. The open doors of wards. The smell of medicine. Somebody being carried on a stretcher, somebody running hastily into the operating theatre.

"I can't do anything with him," Raya tried to explain, flinging out her hands helplessly. But Maria was not listening to her. She opened the door of a small room and swiftly shut it again behind her.

Two probationers were bending over a bed, holding down a wounded man, interrupting each other in their efforts to explain something to him. The wounded man kept tearing himself from their hands — a white mummy, swathed in bandages.

"I don't want it, I don't want it, do you hear, I don't want it! I don't need anybody! Clear out of here, you bitches!"

Maria stepped softly up to him and laid her hand on the bandaged head. A dark eye glared at her gloomily under the thick white folds.

"What d'ye want?" the wounded man barked, but she saw that he recognized her and that he immediately became quieter, ceasing to throw himself about.

"What do you think you're doing? You ought to be ashamed of yourself! What a way to carry on!"

She nodded to the probationers to go. They understood and silently disappeared.

"I've told them a hundred times... Haven't I told them? Haven't I?"

His voice was rising again, with a hysterical note in it that threatened to become a scream.

"What's this wonderful thing you told them?"

"I don't want it! I don't want anything from you all — all your bandages and your injections and your operations and doctors and hospitals! I don't want it! What right have you got to do it, who said you could? I don't want it!"

She sat down on a chair by the bed, without removing her hand from the bandages swathing his head.

"And what is it you're wanting, you stubborn fellow?"

"I want nothing, nothing, you hear me? I want to die, and I've a right to! Why do you torment me?"

"That's very simple and easy, to die," she said quietly. "Of course it's harder to live. But you must live and you will live."

"I don't want to. Why do you waste your time sitting here, nurse, and put guards by me? Is this a prison or what? I'm asking you, is it a prison?"

Slowly, tenderly, she passed her hand over the white bandages, smiling at him gently. The one smouldering eye watched her intently from beneath the white swathings.

"Yesterday you tore off your bandages. You want to injure yourself. It doesn't matter to you that we are troubled about

you and want to help you. You're a stubborn, capricious boy. And that's why we have to watch you."

"Oh, what... it's..."

He became calmer, lay silent for a minute. Maria waited.

"Will you tell me the truth—the real truth, nothing else?" he suddenly asked her.

"I'll try."

He pondered a moment, collecting his thoughts, trying to formulate his question.

"No, you won't tell me the truth, nurse. But just think for a moment... if it were you... Lying in hospital, blind."

"You aren't blind," she said sternly.

"Well, one eye, it's all the same... Lost an eye, lost an arm, a leg. Would you want to live then, eh? Would you?"

He laughed angrily, obstinately, and there was a feverish fire in the one dark eye.

"But tell me the truth, nothing but the truth. That is, if you know how?"

"I'll tell you the truth," Maria replied calmly. "Lie properly. Let me straighten your pillow. That's right. Now listen to me..."

She took his burning hand. He lay there quietly, waiting.

"You see, I can't tell how it would be with me. Maybe I'd want to die too."

"There, you see!"

"Wait a minute."

Suddenly the terrible weariness had all gone. She felt filled with strength, as though her shift had only just begun. Thoughts of Grisha flooded her in a warm wave.

"You see, I have a husband. He's at the front. Maybe at this moment he's wounded just like you are. And I'll tell you the truth — if it should be that he cannot return unharmed—then let him come without arms and legs, anyhow, if only he comes back. My hands will be his, he will see light through my eyes, if only he's there, if only he's with me..."

No, it was not just a wounded man to whom she was speaking, she was imploring fate; history, a merciless world for Grisha's return. Oh, to hear his voice once more, to see his smile, to touch his hand, to tend him, be beside him... Once more to feel that great wave of happiness flooding her heart, that profound faith, to be filled with a calm like that of the deep summer sky, again to know that happiness of having her man by her for ever, to know that he was not wandering along the distant paths of war, that he had come, that they were together again. What would it matter... No, no, she would be able to convince him, help him, just as he had helped her hundreds of times...

"Is that true?" the wounded man asked sternly, and his gloomy eye seemed to bore through her bright face.

"Yes, it's the truth," she said solemnly, as though the words were a vow. "It's the absolute truth."

Now the man was looking at the ceiling. "Because you know, nurse, I have a girl..."

Yes, of course. Now she realized that she had said just the right thing. She had answered just the question that was tormenting him most of all.

The wounded man raised his hand and moved it helplessly before his face.

"What do you want?"

"Under the pillow... There, under the pillow..."

She stretched out her hand. Paper rustled. An envelope made of a page from an exercise book pasted together. The smudged lines of an address.

"Take out the letter, nurse."

A small, smeared piece of paper.

"Read it aloud, nurse, please."

She smoothed out the creases on her knee. The copying ink pencil had smudged and blotted.

"Vassya, my dear! First of all, love from myself and Mummie, Sister Frossya, Auntie and all the neighbours. I'm very glad that I know where you are, your address. Why don't you write me where you are wounded? I want to tell you that I'll come to you all the same, so write me where you're wounded, and even if you're disabled for always, don't you begin thinking things, because I'm just the same as I always was, and I'm writing you so that you won't start getting silly ideas into your head, but write me. Everything's the same at home, your parents are all right too, only we're all waiting for you, so write and tell us if you're going back to the front or home again, and if it's necessary I'll come and fetch you because it would be difficult for your parents, so I'll come. And I send you my love again and I'm waiting for a letter. Good-bye just now. Your Olya."

Maria carefully folded the tattered little sheet. There was a gleam of moisture in the wide open eye staring fixedly at the ceiling.

"Well, there you are, then," said Maria. "I told you so..."

"No, you really think so, nurse?"

"You really are the limit! Why, Olya's written you herself..."

"Yes, of course... But then I start thinking... Maybe it's all very well, but when I come..."

"No, no, it's all clear. Haven't you read the letter, or what?"

"What d'ye mean, not read it? Of course I have. Yesterday and today... But all the same..."

"Eh, you silly fellow, what would she be worth, then, that girl of yours? You'll work together..."

"What sort of work!..." he laughed bitterly.

"You'll have an artificial limb and you'll work. Your wife'll help you, there'll be children and they'll help you too."

"Children..."

"Why, of course. But now you must lie quiet and let your wounds heal. So as to get home quicker. To Olya. Will you lie quietly now?"

"If that's the way it is—yes, I will."

"And you'll do as the doctors tell you?"

"All right..."

"That's the spirit. And no more making fuss and swearing at the nurses."

He looked very uncomfortable.

"How can I—what... Maybe you'll tell them, eh, nurse? Because you see... it's..."

"No, you can just apologize yourself."

A fine thing, that! You can swear at them all right, but when it comes to apologizing then it's: 'Maybe you'll tell them, nurse!'"

"Then I'll do it myself..."

"Of course, you will. Well, I'm going now, and you go to sleep, and remember, no more fuss and trouble from you!"

It was only when she came out onto the stairs that Maria realized how late it was. She hastily buttoned up her coat. There was a warm, glad glow in her heart, like a distant greeting from Grisha, like a hearty grip of his sunburnt hand. She ran swiftly down the stairs. In the vestibule she collided with Vorontsov.

"You still here!" he asked in surprise.

"I was held up a little."

They went out together into the growing light of the street, the cold wind and dripping rain. The sky was brightening, but down here along the houses the envious dawn had not yet dispelled the darkness. Maria stumbled.

"Give me your arm, it's still dark, and there are holes everywhere here."

She leant some of her weight on his arm and suddenly realized how deadly tired she was. A blue spark in the distance, a tram was coming. Vorontsov helped her into the crowded car.

"You're very tired?"

"Why?"

"If you were to invite me in for a cup of tea before you go to bed I wouldn't refuse it."

She smiled.

"Perhaps the doctor will condescend to honour my humble dwelling? There's tea waiting for me, we'll have some together."

"Excellent! Somehow I don't feel like going home one bit. Brrr! What a morning!"

The tram creaked and groaned, swayed round turnings, and the human mass tightly packing the car swayed with it. Maria closed her eyes. Now they were going home in the tram, she and Grisha. He had put an arm round her to protect her from being jostled. She need only bend her head a little to feel the rough woolen material of his coat against her cheek.

An old woman jostled by somebody leaving the tram began to scold. A rough answer followed. Now Grisha's merry voice would ring out, everybody would laugh and the quarrel would be drowned in jokes and laughter.

But there was no Grisha. It was Vorontsov who was protecting her from the people pushing their way out. There was no Grisha. Somewhere else, who knew where, his merry voice was ringing.

Where was he on this cold, dark rainy morning? Perhaps going along some unfamiliar road? Perhaps crawling through the swamps? Or asleep in a dugout? Where was Grisha?

And again the thought which had filled her by the bedside of the wounded man — even if he's blind, without legs, without arms...

"We get out here."

She started. For a moment she found it difficult to realize where she was. Ah, yes, in the tram, and here was her stop.

Again they made their way through the mud. The outlines of the houses were etched sharply against the grey sky. The unnecessary, dark lamp-posts pointed upwards like dead trees stripped of their branches. There were still lights burning in the houses, glimmering faintly through the chinks in the blackout blinds.

Here was her house. She felt breathless as she mounted the stairs. The electric lamps, swathed in their blue paper, shed a dead light which made Vorontsov's face suddenly appear withered and old.

Maria's mother shook hands reluctantly with the guest, and disappeared into the kitchen without replying to his greeting.

"Tea, mother, and as hot as you can make it!"

"Hot, is it!... And all the time I've been waiting for you. Heat it up and heat it up, it keeps boiling and cooling again, and still you don't come..."

With a sigh of relief Maria sank into an old, worn armchair. Stretched out her legs. Her hands hung limply.

"You're tired," he said softly, noting the shadows around her eyes and mouth.

"Worn out," Maria admitted. She did not want to talk. Just to rest, rest! She was glad Vorontsov had come. When he was there she felt somehow safer and more confident. Her mother, however, as usual, chose to show her disapproval of the guest. Protecting Grisha's rights... as though they needed it!

"What are you laughing about?"

"Laughing?" she repeated in surprise.

"Well, perhaps I was. You know, I was just thinking that Mummie's more like a mother-in-law in the house."

He struck his cigarette lighter, a tiny blue flame started up and went out immediately.

"The matches are there, on the table."

He could not find them. She rose with difficulty and moved the box over towards him. Her eyes fell upon a photograph. It was Grisha. Grisha to the life, the gay sparkle of his eyes, the bold turn of his head. Grisha...

"Had you any operations today?"

"Yes, you know..."

She closed her eyes. It looked as though she were listening attentively, but she heard not a word. She was half asleep, in a kind of waking doze. She could hear Vorontsov's voice coming from a long way off, without comprehending what he was telling her. She was far, far away, beside Grisha. She was telling him about Vassya, of his

profound despair, about the girl's letter, and how he, Grisha had helped her. Because it was he who had helped her. He had prompted the words she ought to say, and taken the burden of weariness from her; it was the reflection of his smile upon her lips that had been perhaps more convincing than her words. Grisha...

"Isn't that right?" The words penetrated her senses and she agreed politely:

"Of course, of course."

Vorontsov continued his story. The words buzzed and hummed like a brook. Grisha's voice was different. It suddenly sounded in her ears as though it were in the room with her. Clear, bubbling with gaiety that sounded in its every note even when he was talking of the most ordinary things.

Slippers shuffled along the corridor. Tatyana Petrovna brought in a teapot and two cups on the tray.

"And you, Mummie, aren't you going to have a cup with us?"

"I've had some already," she replied ungraciously with a shrug. No, these visits did not please her. This doctor was coming here far too often. And although Maria did not seem to pay much attention to him, still... Queer kinds of visits at eight o'clock in the morning! To sit there with them drinking tea would seem like sanctioning something of which she disapproved, that she considered improper. The worn heels of her slippers flapping on the floor, she withdrew into the other room, demonstratively shutting the door behind her.

"There's no sugar," said Maria as if it were necessary to say what they already knew—that there was no sugar. All their ration Tatyana Petrovna had carefully put away for some indefinite rainy day.

"What fair hair you have, Maria," said Vorontsov unexpectedly.

She laughed.

"So the doctor has only just deigned to notice it? How observant of you! When I was little the other children used to tease me, call me whitey. I used to be miserable about it, I thought it would always be as light as that. But afterwards it got a little darker."

No, he had known for a long time what wonderful fair hair she had. But now, as she had stooped to pour out the tea, the light from the table lamp had caught the curls over her forehead, turning them into a halo of transparent, almost silver mist. He gazed at the brightness of it, at the dark lowered lashes, the straight line of the nose, and felt a sharp stab in his heart. There was something happy in each one of her movements, in every step she took, a kind of eternally living strength rising from some deep source. Even when she was utterly tired out, when he met her in the hospital corridor after a twenty-four-hour stretch of duty, with blue shadows under her eyes, there was still that joy of youth in her face.

She brought this invincible youth with her into the hospital wards; with it she conquered the gloom, the fevered visions, the despair of life that is sinking, and the shadow of coming death, with greater ease

and sureness than older, more qualified and experienced nurses. What was it that gave her this strength, inspired that smile that barely changed the lines of her mouth, but nevertheless seemed like some light shining from within?

This was a question, he did not wish to answer. It was not the first time he had seen that significant look at the photograph. Her smile was almost a reflection of that other, masculine smile, Grisha's smile. Her husband, whom she had not seen for nearly a year, was here with her, he never left her side for a moment. She lived in his smile, and from it she drew her strength.

Vorontsov slowly stirred his tea. She laughed.

"No need to stir it, there's no sugar there," she said as though explaining something perfectly obvious to some stubborn fretful wounded man.

"No, I know," he said in some confusion. "I was just trying to cool it, it's very hot." But he laid down his spoon.

Maria drank in tiny sips, holding her cup in both hands. Oh, how good it was to rest, to drink hot tea, to feel the warmth from the little iron stove filling the room. If only she did not have to talk! How she longed to be silent,—it was difficult even to move her lips, but on the other hand it was rude to make a show of attention with just smiles and nods.

She switched on the wireless. Yes, that was the best way. To listen to the music. No need to listen if you didn't like it, but you did not have to talk.

A song floated through the air. Once upon a time, many, many years ago, it had grown out of the boundless steppe, the wind had blown it over wide meadows, the river had sung it as its waters rippled into the boundless distance, to the great roaring sea. The melody became a song, sung by a human voice in a ringing, mournful cantilena. No need to listen to the words. The song was of Grisha, of his merry smile, of the days of happy youth, of the apple-trees, their branches with the stars of June and July nights shining through them. Of sandy paths in the pine forest. Of dense raspberry thickets covered with rosy berries. Of words whispered from lip to lip, from heart to heart. Of the sunny path trodden together.

The song ceased, and suddenly her heart contracted painfully. Maria pulled herself together. No, no! Grisha existed, he was near her, the air still held the ring of his laughter, the sound of his words. There was still the grip of his sunburnt hand with the white scar on the finger. And suddenly the violin caught the sound of Grisha's voice, a nightingale was singing, a silver cascade of sounds was rippling down. "Grisha, Grisha!" her heart whispered. It beat as with impatient wings, filled with an incomprehensible joy, an infinite happiness, because Grisha existed. Perhaps he was wandering along far paths, perhaps lying in a trench, perhaps going into the attack, but he existed, Grisha, her Grisha!

"It's late, I must go," said Vorontsov, the voice of a stranger. She opened her eyes. It was as though she had returned from some long journey, from an unknown country, where she had been walking hand in hand with Grisha.

"Late?" she repeated confusedly.

He rose. His brows were drawn together, and there was a painful twist to his lips. She made no attempt to stop him; she wanted to be alone with Grisha.

Vorontsov hastily pulled on his coat. He barely touched her hand in parting and went out into the chilly morning, the cutting wind and the driving needles of rain. He turned his face up to the stinging lash of it, calling himself the harshest names, clenching the fists thrust into his pockets.

A crowded tram had just left. All the better, he thought, and strode down the wet street. Anger at himself rose in a hot wave. And then at Maria. At her light, almost transparent hair, her slender, skilful fingers, the smile shining from somewhere within her, her ringing voice, even the quiet, comfortable room with the photograph of her husband on the table, the photograph of her husband on the wall. And then at that husband. That Grisha, who had been away for a whole year and nevertheless was here—appearing in the hospital wards, riding with her in the trams, sitting invisibly by the table under the light of the lamp, never leaving her for a moment. He was not so stupid as not to understand how it was. She treated him as a child treats a plush bear, a nice teddy. And that was all he had ever been to her. He knew, he could feel in his bones the presence of that other. That other who never left her for one single moment.

"I'm a cad," he said aloud and even started. But there was nobody in the street, nobody could have heard him. He pulled his cap lower down over his eyes and walked quickly forging his way through the icy streams of rain with his bent head.

Meanwhile Maria had slowly risen and begun to clear away the cups from the table. Slippers shuffled, a door creaked.

"Has he gone at last?"

"He's gone, it's quite late."

"I should think it is... Sitting and sitting there..."

"Why should that trouble you?"

"Hasn't he got any home to go to, then?"

"But you know, Mummie, he hasn't anybody of his own."

"All the same, there's nothing for him to come around for here."

Maria laughed.

"But he doesn't come for anything."

"Oh, I know all about it, I've seen a thing or two in my day," grumbled the old woman. "Let them alone, I'll clear away myself, you go to bed. Not enough with wearing yourself out at the hospital, you have to have visitors here too..."

"What sort of visitors are you talking about, Mummie? He came, sat here for a little, and went away. You surely don't grudge him a glass of tea?"

"You're talking nonsense... Tea..."

Maria made up her bed. She wanted just to sleep, sleep, sleep. To fling herself down on the bed without undressing, so as not to have to pull off her stockings and unfasten her dress, now, at once...

"A nice thing, indeed, sitting there all this while when you can hardly keep your eyes open..."

Tatyana Petrovna went to the wall and pulled out the wireless plug. The violin melody broke off in the middle of a phrase. The song was silent.

"Go to sleep now. It's broad daylight already."

She had not even the strength to reply, a soft, warm wave seemed to seize her, and everything was submerged in azure depths, golden foam, a loud melody shot with a strange light.

This was the moment when consciousness returned to Captain Grigori Chernov. He felt as though he were returning from some infinitely remote place, where something had happened to him. But what? He could remember nothing. The world had melted into a blinding, thundering glare.

And now everything was quiet. Amazingly quiet. He thought that it was this silence that had brought him to. But he understood nothing of what was happening around him. Just before his eyes there was something grey, and he could distinguish some kind of long stripes, long straight ridges with hollows between them—identical, repeated monotonously. What was it all? The field? The sector? Furrows? No, this grey-blown expanse was no field. It was on top of him, above him, in some incomprehensible way overhead. Just as though the earth had stood on edge, the sort of thing one sees looking out of an aeroplane when the pilot makes his last circle before landing at the airfield.

It seemed strangely close to his eyes, he felt himself squinting as he looked at it. He wanted to move his head away in order to see normally, but found himself unable to. What was it all? Had some hill come down on top of him? Or was he buried? But he could breathe, and feel the moisture of the air on his lips. Was it raining? His face was wet, the skin seemed painfully stretched and tight. His mind was dull and confused, he could understand nothing.

At this moment a muffled, distant, familiar sound struck his ears.

Guns—the captain recognized it, and all at once everything whirled into its place. The grey-brown hills and valleys were neither field nor furrows, but simply the material of somebody's uniform lying on top of him. He realized this, he could clearly see it now, and the sense of size and distance returned to him. And it was not a hill that had descended upon him, he was simply lying, under a pile of dead. He could make out a belt, a limply hanging hand, a boot sole, the mangled barrel of a rifle. Something hindered his vision, he could see only out of one eye. He tried to take a deep breath but found it impossible. An unbearable weight lay on his

chest, crushing him, choking him. What was it? And what was this terrible pain, the precise location of which he could not determine? His face hurt, that was certain. And what more? The rest of his body seemed not to belong to him, as though it had merged with that pile of bodies rising over him.

His thoughts were dull and confused. He tried to bring them into some kind of order. The battle was over, that was clear. There were no Germans about. The roar of the guns was coming from far away, and Captain Chernov guessed that the units had gone ahead. That meant that the Germans had been driven off. He tried to remember what had happened to him, personally, but could recall nothing beyond the moment of the attack: after that everything disappeared in a blinding light... How was he to find out exactly what was hurting him, and whether he was wounded or not? It was impossible to move his arm. It was held down by a terrible weight. But just to move a finger, to feel his own body, to find himself in this pile of corpses...

But it was impossible. Where were they, his arms, the left, the right? Evidently they had stiffened so that he could no longer move them. His legs... even only the toes... Pain, terrible pain, but where—he could not tell. It was only his head that existed, lived, thought, worked. The rest no longer belonged to him, it had become part of what was lying around it and on top of it. He raised his eyes. Like logs, just like a pile of old rags. Who were they? Ours? Germans? Everything was growing dark before his eyes, but he could still see—yes, they were ours. It occurred to him that the bodies had been brought here from the battlefield and laid all together. But how had he come here with them? He was not dead, that he knew for certain. The pain was enough to convince him of that. How did he come to be here? Evidently, somebody had been here, collected the bodies, brought them here. But when had that been? It seemed as though only an instant had passed between the moment when that blinding light had flashed and that other moment when he saw the uniforms, not understanding at first what it was he saw.

The uniforms darkened, merged one into the other. There was an unpleasant, nauseous taste in Grigori's mouth. He sank into a swaying grey dusk, into a thick fog which moved and pulsated like something living.

Again he recovered consciousness. It was the growing pain that brought him out of the grey dusk, the infinite distance. It was cold. With an effort he turned his head and saw that he was lying on the ground. A band of snow commenced at his very lips, sprinkled with something black and soaked with red. Further away, there was the bare earth, then again snow, the slope of a ravine, hillsides, some trees. He made an effort to remember. Yes, that hill was familiar, it was the one he had come down. But where had everyone disappeared, where had they all gone? He

wanted to shout, but only a feeble croak came from his throat. Oh, the cold! Icy ground, and a penetrating damp in the air.

Suddenly he heard a creaking. A brown spot swam into his field of vision. Yes, a horse's head. It rose from somewhere below, followed by a tense, straining back. The horse was evidently pulling something. Then a man's head appeared—one of ours.

Grigori stared intently, trying to penetrate the grey mist in which everything swam, which erased all forms and took possession of everything. Grigori tore himself from the clammy clutch, fought it down with a superhuman effort.

The horse was pulling a long low sledge. A man was lying on it, his head covered with a blanket. The whole sledge had now emerged from the ravine and was moving along an ice-covered slope. The horse moved with difficulty, its hooves slithering, the harness cutting into its body. The soldier walking alongside encouraged it, put his shoulder against the sledge to help it along. In this way they came up half of the slope. Here the horse began slowly, inch by inch to slide back, down and down. The soldier shouted and urged it on. He held it, tried to help it. But he himself began to slide with it down the smooth slope. They stumbled, stumbled, slowly but inevitably, until the sledge disappeared into the ravine, then the man, and finally the horse's head as well.

Again the sea of grey fog. And again the horse's head, then the man's head, and finally the sledge. Grigori watched what was happening on the slope intently, as though it were the most important thing in life. Forward, forward—the horse placed its hooves carefully, strained its muscles, the sledge moved forward. Grigori waited. Yes, here they were again at the same spot, the horse stumbled, slid backward, and again they all disappeared. And again the horse appeared, the man, the sledge, and on the sledge the long human figure, the head covered with a blanket.

"They're carrying a wounded man." Grigori realized. It must be a serious wound—there was not a movement to be seen, not a groan to be heard.

"But I'm wounded as well," thought Grigori. Was he really wounded? He was by no means certain of it. The main thing was that he could not move, he was gripped as in a vice. And his voice gone into the bargain.

He could not tear his eyes away from the moving figure on the slope, but its outlines were becoming more and more vague. The horse was no longer a horse, the man no longer a man, they flickered over the snow like some huge mysterious shadows. But perhaps it was all just a dream, and he was lying in the dugout, the night before the attack? He was asleep, lying in some awkward position, as occasionally happens, and this was a nightmare choking him, crushing him, preventing him from breathing. There was nobody on the slope. Why, that was the slope which he had examined when they had taken up their positions here. Something had

fallen on him from the upper berth and was crushing him, crushing him. He must wake up, he must wake up at once. Yes, of course, that was how it always is in dreams—you want to cry out, strain every effort, but your voice dies in your throat, and all that emerges is a weak, helpless pipe, an inaudible prattle... Of course, it was a dream... And that fog, it was rolling up again, huge, limitless, filling the whole world, swaying, hurting...

Suddenly the fog disappeared just as though somebody had dispersed it with a sweep of the hand. Grigori felt an agonizing pain and saw everything with terrible clarity. No, this was no dream. Obviously the battle had already taken place, the offensive had begun that morning. They had stormed the village on the hill—then there had been an explosion, and he could not remember himself running on afterwards—evidently, it was this explosion which had caught him. He was lying there, wounded, under the bodies of the killed. Evidently they had been brought here, to this place, and he had been taken for dead. There, on the slope, they were carrying away the wounded—if only he could shout, a soldier would come and help him. But he could not.

He would have to wait. What for, if it came to that? Either somebody would come past, or else they would simply begin to bury the dead, and then they would find him. Only he must not lose consciousness, so as not to be taken for dead again. It was simply a question of when they would come. It might be today, tomorrow, the day after.

The cold became more penetrating. Grigori felt an unbearable nausea. If only he knew just where he was wounded. But even that he could not ascertain. Which would prove the stronger,—he or the wound, cold and time?

And the time dragged on interminably. Though it could not possibly be as long as it seemed. There, on the slope, the man was still struggling with the ice-covered surface, with the horse, in a frantic battle for the life of another man.

Again the grey fog.

"Maria, the director's sent for you."

"What does he want, do you know?"

"No idea. Just said that you were to come to him."

Humming a tune, she smoothed her hair before the mirror hanging above the washstand. There was only one lamp burning in the director's office, on the writing table. He raised his eyes as she entered and then rose, continuing to rearrange some papers.

"You sent for me, Mikhail Nikitich?"

"Yes, yes, just a minute..." he mumbled confusedly, his head sank. Maria was surprised.

"What's happened, Mikhail Nikitich?"

"Nothing, nothing..."

He raised his eyes to her again, came out from behind the writing table and took her hands. This alarmed her. As yet she thought of nothing, but she felt a sudden chill run down her spine to her very feet, and her face went cold.

"Maria Pavlovna, you have always been a sensible, courageous woman."

She did not understand and looked at him enquiringly; there was a rushing sound in her ears. What was it? What was the matter?

"What's to be done, Maria Pavlovna... War..."

"What's happened?" she asked him again in a muffled voice, unlike her own. An awful fear seized her, an uncomprehending, strangling terror. The director turned to the writing table and took up a paper.

It was as though lightning had struck her. The room seemed filled with a blinding light. She swayed and leaned quickly against the table to prevent herself from falling.

"Grisha!" It flashed across her mind, the thought that should have struck her first when she entered the office and saw the director's confused, uncertain glance.

"That's for you...the letter..."

She took it with stiffened fingers. It was not even a letter. Just an ordinary notice—how many of them had she seen since the beginning of the war. But those other ones had not been addressed to her.

Maria unfolded the sheet. Actually, there was no need for her to read it, she knew all that was written there beforehand. Mechanically her eyes travelled along the lines.

Yes, of course. The usual formula. Captain Grigori Chernov had died the death of the brave in battle for the liberty and independence of his country.

Unconsciously she crushed the paper in her fingers. The director again took her hand.

"Maria Pavlovna, you've got to be brave..."

She smiled, without herself knowing why.

"Yes, yes, I understand." Then added: "May I go?"

He nodded, and Maria left the office without another word. A long corridor, a red runner along the floor. A cigarette end in the entry. A nice thing—smoking was forbidden altogether on this floor, and they even throw the cigarette ends about. She stopped, picked up the end and threw it into a spittoon standing in the corner. What a hideous red runner! How was it she had never noticed it before? What an eyesore! There should not be such bright colours in a hospital. And what a long corridor—she began mechanically to count the paces she took. Ten, twelve. And the staircase—how many steps were there? Queer, it had never occurred to her before to count them... Twelve, twelve here too. Who was that? Oh, yes, Raissa. What a funny name—Ra-i-ssa...

"What's happened? Why did he send for you?" asked Raissa indifferently, as she put some instruments away in the cupboard.

"Oh, nothing..."

"What do you mean, nothing?"

Raissa turned round, and suddenly saw the terrible look on Maria's face.

"What's happened, Maria?"

"Nothing..."

"Nonsense! Something 'unpleasant?'"

"Unpleasant?"

A wry, resentful smile twisted Maria's lips. Unpleasant—was that what you called it?

"Yes, something of the kind..."

"Yes, but what is it? Why don't you tell me?"

Maria suddenly sank onto a chair as though her legs had suddenly been cut from under her. There was something childishly helpless in her voice as she said:

"Grisha's dead..."

Raissa cried out, and swift, easy tears streamed from her eyes. She ran to her friend.

"Maria! Maria!"

Maria put her aside. Her eyes were fixed on a brown knot in the smooth parquet floor. Like an opening rosebud.

"Grisha's dead," she said again, listening to the sound of her own voice. "Grisha's dead," she repeated again, louder, and was horrified at what she was saying. Because it was not true, it could not be true. Nonsense, a stupid lie, some sort of terrible word that must not be repeated.

A red light flashed on the numbered board. Raissa jumped up.

"I'll go."

"It's my ward," Maria replied in her usual voice, hastily running a wet towel over her face.

In the corridor she met a nurse.

"What's the matter there?"

"Number seven's dying. He's in great pain."

"Seven? Oh, yes, we already knew about him. The doctor warned us, we thought he'd have gone during the day."

She went softly into the ward. Who was it that was dying? Grisha. What nonsense! Grisha could not die. She went up to the wounded man, who was burning with fever, the heat seemed to radiate from him. He was breathing heavily, and his fingers were picking at the white coverlet with a hasty, monotonous movement. Maria bent over him. His eyes were dull, his breath whistled through his nose. One glance was sufficient—he was approaching the far shore. He had already put off. For that matter, it was to have been expected from the very beginning—a bad stomach wound, infection—he had been doomed even before coming here.

The wounded man groaned. She bent lower. Saw that he recognized her. With a tremendous effort of will she called up a smile, the smile for which all the wounded loved her, which gave them hope, cheerful courage and calm. But here there was no more hope, no more cheerful courage, here all that was needed was peace.

She adjusted the ice-bag on his head. The wet strands of hair clung to his forehead. She put them gently aside, and laid her hand on the trembling fingers picking at the quilt.

"Ooooh..."

"Quiet, quiet, you mustn't..."

She glanced at the slip over the bed and prepared some medicine. Carefully she poured it with a spoon between the dry lips. The patient was calmed, he lay quietly

for a moment. Then his lips began to move. He was saying something. His eyes were demanding something. At first she could understand nothing. The wounded man kept repeating one word, continually, hoarsely, monotonously. He made an impatient effort to speak louder. At last she could distinguish some sounds in the determined whisper and understood. The wounded man was repeating one word, over and over again:

"Communiqué... Communiqué... Communiqué..."

"You want to know the latest war communiqué?"

His lids sank for a moment. The tense, strained expression left his face. She had guessed aright. Stooping over him, she said slowly and clearly:

"Our offensive is continuing. Today we advanced another twenty kilometres. We have taken over a hundred inhabited places."

The wounded man's face cleared. There was a brighter light of consciousness in the fever-dulled eyes. This was what he had wanted. It was this that had tormented him. But a moment later the fingers resumed their picking movement, and the eyes dulled again. He was far away. He had sunk into the depths of feverish delirium, in a dark fire-shot emptiness. Again his lips began to move, but not one sound could she catch. He was saying something to himself, or to the visions of the pathless fever waste. His lips moved swiftly, swiftly.

Suddenly Maria realized that her lips were moving too, that she too, as though in fever, was whispering the one word over and over—Grisha.

She pulled herself together. Because of course it was all a hallucination, an evil suggestion, a monstrous dream, a mistake.

A paper rustled in the pocket of her nurse's overall. This paper—it was something real, but it also meant nothing.

The wounded man groaned. She came to herself. Again she righted the ice-bag on his head and pulled up the coverlet. The whispering increased. Louder and louder, the scorched lips murmured indistinct words, confused phrases, cried something incomprehensible. Suddenly he started up, raised himself on his elbow and in a hoarse, penetrating voice that filled the room, he shouted:

"Forward! For country and Stalin!"

He raised himself, tried to get to his feet. With difficulty Maria held him down on the bed. He pushed her away with blind blows. She turned, trying to save her face from his blows, caught his hands repeating: "Now, quiet, quiet, keep quiet, you must lie quietly, quiet, quiet..."

At last his strength gave out and, breathing heavily, he fell back on the pillow, and lay there motionless. His face had yellowed, his nose sharpened. For a moment his breathing was so weak that Maria thought he had gone. But then the whispering began again. A swift, monotonous, incessant sound from the scorched lips and dying voice. He was seeing something, answering somebody, asking a ques-

tion of somebody. It had all nothing to do with the sickbed, with his death agony. He was somewhere far, far away, on the battlefield, bending over a map, and with deep feeling, with infinite love measuring the expanse of his country, its space and extent. He was troubled and agitated about something, he was insisting about something, he urgently wanted to do something, finish something. He was dying for his country here, on the hospital bed, but all his thoughts, all his care, anxiety and agitation were there, where the guns were thundering and machines rumbling, where the serried ranks of his comrades, teeth gritted and eyes red with sleeplessness, were going shouting into the attack. And nothing else existed for this man in his last moments, only this one thing, this one thing. Maria tried to catch the sense of the feverish whispering, to reply, to help, but he no longer saw nor heard her.

When would this spectral night end? The minutes ticked slowly past, dragged out to an infinite length, seemed to stop altogether. Everything was confused in her mind—Grisha, the dying man, Raissa, the director—when was it she had been with the director? Yesterday, the day before, a year ago? And had she been with him at all?

What time was it? She looked at the clock, but it had stopped. The wounded man's whispering continued, penetrating, incessant. The lips moved faster and faster, the fingers picked at the quilt.

Another paper bearing black news. But in this case they wrote: "Died of wounds." Who would receive that fatal sheet, who would see the sun go out, for whom would a black line mark this day that saw the end of joy, of happiness?

She went to the window and raised the blind. The squares of glass had become barely visible grey patches. Maria put out the light. Slowly the pale winter dawn crept into the room. From the darkness the bedside table gradually emerged, the glass, the medicine bottle, the wounded man's head on the pillow, the yellow waxen face, its black eye sockets, the cracked lips, the strand of hair clinging to the forehead.

The light increased. And it was as though the approaching morning sucked in the dying man's last vitality, absorbed it, and strengthened as he weakened, advancing, driving away the shadows, conquering the night.

When every object in the room stood out clearly, and the last shreds of darkness were concealed in the corners, Maria saw that the fingers had ceased their movement. The lips were silent and quiet. The wounded man had died in silence, his wide-open eyes were fixed on the white ceiling, frozen in some troubled question that could never be answered.

Maria sighed and rang the bell. A sleepy assistant nurse entered.

"He's dead," she said curtly. "I'm going."

She went downstairs, moving her numb legs with difficulty. Her fumbling fingers

were unable to fasten her coat. Her gashes she completely forgot.

Vorontsov followed her down with long strides. His duty had finished at the same time.

"Are you going, Maria?" he asked a foolish question, for he could see that she was.

Maria looked at him with unseeing eyes.

"Yes, I'm going..."

Her voice was dull, changed. There were black circles under her eyes, and the cheeks were hollow. She stood motionless, as though it were difficult for her to turn the door handle.

"I'll see you home."

"Home?" she protested. "No, no, not home, anything but that..."

There was a car standing at the entrance. She wanted to go around it, but Vorontsov took her carefully by the elbow and led her to the door. She moved along submissively, and it was only when she was inside that she said in surprise:

"A car?"

Actually it did not interest her in the least. She simply asked mechanically, without thinking. As a matter of fact, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to her that there should be a car there. For otherwise she would never have been able to get as far as the tram. For a moment she wondered why. After all, every day she went home, walked to the tram, but today she could not. What had happened, what was it—she tried to remember.

"It's the director's car. Come home with me. You're right, you can't go home now..."

"Can't... can't... can't..." she repeated. What couldn't she? Oh yes, there had been something impossible, something that you couldn't bear...

"Grisha's dead," she said suddenly. Vorontsov took her hand.

"I know, Maria."

He helped her out of the car. For a moment she looked round in surprise, where were they going? This was a different staircase. But she did not even hear him answer.

The key grated in the lock. The entry, the room. She halted on the threshold, not knowing what to do.

"Lie down, Maria. You must rest. I'll get some tea ready at once, and you shall have breakfast."

At the very thought of food she felt a sudden nausea. And again, like a nail boring into her skull, the word beat naggingly: "Must, must, must..."

What must she? Yes, yes, something she had to do, some relentless duty which she could not avoid.

She sat down on the divan, staring unthinkingly out of the window. Naked branches swayed in the wind. Here and there, here and there...

"Why don't you take off your coat? Take it off, it's warm in here."

She looked at him uncomprehendingly. He came and removed her coat and beret.

"Your feet are quite wet. How can you think of going out in such weather with-

out galoshes? Only those few steps to the car, and soaked through."

Hearing nothing, she continued to stare through the window. He knelt down and removed the shoes, then pulled off the wet stockings. For a second his senses deserted him, with a sudden movement he pressed his head to her knees. Mechanically she laid her hand on his head. Rising to his knees, he put his arms round her.

"Maria, Maria..."

But in that same instant he realized that she neither saw nor heard him. With dead eyes Maria was staring through the window. He bit his lips and rose. Laid her down carefully on the divan and covered her with a rug. She allowed him to tuck her up, motionless, passive, like some large doll.

The electric kettle was boiling. He made tea and sat down beside her with a glass in his hand.

"Drink this tea. You must have some, even if it's only a drop."

Carefully he fed her with the spoon, like a child. The warm stream flowed down her throat, warmed her. She drank eagerly.

"You must eat something."

She fell back, while another wave of nausea surged through her.

"No, no, no!"

"You mustn't go on like this, Maria, you must eat, sleep, rest."

"No..."

"Don't be stubborn. You have to go on living... What's done can't be undone... But you've got to go on living..."

"Got to?" she repeated, between surprise and query.

Then, looking out of the window, in a wooden voice:

"Grisha's dead..."

"Listen, Maria, listen to me! People do die, that's war, that's what war means. You know yourself, you're not the only one... Wives are left, children, sweethearts. That's war... But we... but those who are left have to go on living, work for them and for ourselves."

"But Grisha's dead," she repeated in the same tone.

"Yes, Maria, and that's the price of victory... You understand, the price of victory... Grisha and others too."

"But you're alive," she suddenly said loudly and clearly, and laughed maliciously.

A wave of scarlet swept over his face. "But, Maria, you know!"

Yes, she knew perfectly well. A serious heart disease. Besides, he was a doctor, a specialist, a surgeon, and was doing the thing he could do best, working where he was needed most.

For some mysterious reason it gave her satisfaction to see the scarlet wave flood the doctor's face. And to see his hands begin to tremble. This was what she wanted, to sting him, painfully, unjustly, viciously, to hurt him as much as possible...

He sat there pale and unhappy. It occurred to her that really she should pity

him, but it gave her a kind of satisfaction to see him sitting there so unhappy, he, the big specialist, Dr. Victor Nikolayevich, before whom newcomers shook in their shoes. Sitting there like a boy, with his small moustache, which looked as though it were glued to the upper lip, trembling comically.

Suddenly, like a blow of an axe, the realization of what had happened struck her. It meant nothing that she had repeated those terrible words so many times already. Her lips had pronounced them, but in the way one pronounces the incomprehensible sounds of some strange language, which convey nothing. She sat down, her whole body began to tremble. Depthless despair widened the pupils of her eyes until they seemed quite black. She wrung her hands.

"Grisha's dead!"

Vorontsov sprang to her. She was trembling, shaking, gasping for air. From the very depths of her being a sob rose racking and tearing her, until at last it broke out in terrible, loud unrestrained weeping.

He sat down beside her, put his arm carefully round her. Maria laid her head on his shoulder like a child. He held her in his arms, as though trying to save her, defend her, protect her from all harm, from the whole world, from relentless fate. In that moment he felt nothing but infinite tenderness, infinite pity, a brother's love for an injured, forlorn, homeless sister, who had nobody left in the world except him. He wrapped up her trembling body as well as he might, and awkwardly tried to wipe away the continuous flow of tears.

The weeping passed into broken sobs, childish gasps. He rose and gave her a powder. She shook her head, but took it. Her teeth rattled against the edge of the glass.

"Now you will sleep," he said, and covering her with a blanket, placed a cushion under her head. The wet lashes sank onto her cheeks. He sat down beside her, holding her hand, and watched the occasional helpless sobs shaking her in her sleep. Her cheeks were wet with tears, they had soaked the shining strands of hair on her temples. And suddenly he longed, more than anything else on earth, to touch this hair with his lips; but he turned away with a sigh.

Vorontsov rose and went to the window. It was raining, fine, penetrating rain. Outside in the yard people were milling around a lorry. A tall broad-shouldered man heaved a sack onto his back with a single movement, and Vorontsov could see the grin brightening his sun-burnt face. A child tried to jump across a puddle, and landed short, raising a whole fountain of water. The man with the sack on his back laughed, and even at that distance Vorontsov could see the white flash of his teeth.

A dried lily of the valley fell out of the book, a yellowed fragile flower. Once

upon a time it had been growing in a thicket in the shade of low bushes smelling of fresh green. The enchanting white serrated bells peeped out from among the half-open leaves. There had been the strong, sweet perfume of the soil, still covered with last year's dry leaves. Following the perfume, they had come to this nook, damp and shady, filled with dew and the scent of earth: awakening from its long sleep. Their fingers had met in the lily of the valley thicket, in the loveliness of spring, among smooth, shining leaves, among the supple, slender stems. Their hands had clasped in a strong fraternal, hearty pressure. Fingers had plucked the white flower. And so it had remained, folded into the book in memory of that day which had passed into the procession of other days, distinguished from them by the perfume of the snowy lilies, the gleam of the dew on the silky leaves. Yes, there had been such a day of the lily of the valley. Her day and Grisha's.

And now the shadows of these hours lay in her hand, a memory devoid of hope, a mocking symbol. The silky whiteness had yellowed, the round bells were flat and dry, the sap of life was no longer in them. The enchanting perfume was gone, a spider-web of veins had covered the young green of the leaves, they had become yellowish-grey, transparent, sick.

"The lily of the valley day..."

"What's that you said, Maria?"

She raised unseeing eyes to Vorontsov. She had completely forgotten of his existence. Forgotten that he was sitting there in her room. But he sat there, attentive, sympathetic, with that continual unbearable strain in his gaze.

"Oh, nothing!"

She held the dry, withered flower in her hand. Weighed it on her palm. As light as a puff of down. Was it possible that it had once meant so much to her? That once it had been the embodiment of perfume, dawn and beauty? Where was that day, that day irrevocably lost, gone never to return?

"I wanted to tell you, Maria..."

She carefully laid the dry flower back in the book.

"I wanted to tell you... Perhaps it's not necessary, but... I understand... You see I would like you never to forget that beside you there is a man who is devoted to you, who is always, always ready to do anything on this earth to help you... So that..."

There was something supercilious, scornful in her smile.

"Never mind about that."

How could anything help now, how could anybody change what had happened?

"You've no right, Maria... You're not the only one, remember, not the only one... How many women there are nowadays..."

She shook her head. What did Vorontsov know about it? How many times she and Grigori had told each other, how many times their happy lips had repeated

that they were really one, one! No, nowhere, never, could there have been between two people what there had been between them. Other wives, other husbands — yes, of course, there were many wives and many husbands, but their love had been something unique, irreplaceable.

"What is it, exactly, that you're wanting of me? What am I doing? Am I working any worse? No, I'm working as I always worked. I'm living as I did before. Then just what is it all about?"

"Don't lie, Maria; you're burning yourself up, you're destroying yourself, rack-ing yourself..."

"Well, and what if I am?"

"You've got to take yourself in hand."

She laughed unpleasantly.

"And haven't I taken myself in hand?"

What can you hold up against me? Have I tried to throw myself off the bridge, do I go out into the square and scream, tear my hair, beat my hands against the walls? And why do you interfere in my life? Kindly allow me to live as I choose, I think I have a right to that. Why do you take such an interest in me, in my affairs?"

He dropped his head, twisting and untwisting his fingers.

"There is one reason, Maria, you know yourself very well that there's a reason," he said in a muffled voice, without looking at her.

"Reason... That's all wrong, doctor... it's all unnecessary, untruthful, and what's more, boring."

"I've made you sick of me. I thought..."

"I don't know what you thought. But there is one thing."

"What's, that?"

She leaned her head on the back of the chair and covered her eyes.

"Well, there is one thing in which you could help me. But you don't, you go on repeating the same old thing — you see, Maria, you know, Maria..."

"Why are you so angry? What is it? You never told me."

"Never told you?" she repeated in surprise. "Yes, that's true, I didn't. I must go to Beryozovka."

"To Beryozovka?"

"Yes, of course, not to New York or Shanghai To Beryozovka."

"But how do you want to go?"

"The usual way. As people always go. Get into the train and go there."

He was silent for a moment.

"For long, Maria?"

"No, not for a long time at all. I just want to go there, to see it. Just to see it once. You understand me, just to see it once!"

"Do you think that that will help you?"

"I don't think anything at all. Oh, how can I tell! There you are, you said: 'Always, if I need you'... And now you can't arrange it for me somehow without all kinds of questions? I would have to talk to the director... But I can't... And so, if you..."

He thought for a moment.

"That can be arranged. I have to go

and inspect a hospital, you know, in connection with those reports I told you about. And that is the next station to Beryozovka. We'll go..."

"But must it be that way — together with you? I want to see it alone. Quite alone."

"Don't worry, Maria. We'll travel together, you'll get out at Beryozovka, and on the way back I'll pick you up. I only need one day, and that'll probably be enough for you too. They say that Beryozovka's suffered badly."

"I don't know. I don't know anything. I must see for myself."

She looked at the clock.

"You're going somewhere, Maria?"

"No... But I suppose you'll be wanting to go."

"Of course, I'm going. You're not very nice to me today."

"I'm not nice at all. I've no intention of being nice. I don't see any reason why I should be."

"To me."

"Neither to you nor to anybody else. And in general..."

"Good-bye, Maria. I think that next week I shall be able to arrange it, if you want it so much."

"I do. I've wanted it for a long time. I don't see that there's anything so remarkable in wanting to look at Beryozovka."

"Of course, nothing remarkable. Only... is it really necessary?..."

"Oh..."

"Very well, then, as you wish. Forgive me, Maria. Good-bye."

She accompanied him to the entry and hastily returned to the room. Two or three minutes more, and it would have been too late.

Now she turned on the wireless. How many times during the war she had turned on the wireless and heard, no, lived rather, what the announcer had been saying.

"Our troops developed their offensive and took..."

The names of places. She closed her eyes and listened. Not so very long ago, every communiqué had seemed to her to be a greeting from Grisha, news of Grisha. He might be there, in anyone of the places named. It was he who had occupied the village and broken into the town, he had made the flanking movement, he had made the forced march, he had attacked and wiped out the enemy, taken prisoners, captured booty. It was Grisha playing that gay march, it was to Grisha that Moscow sent its greeting in the thunder of guns, the flare of rockets, in the flush of triumph, the rapture of victory...

Villages, hamlets, stations—more and more of them. But now, it was no longer a greeting from Grisha, news of him, his merry voice coming to her across a boundless distance. That voice no longer existed. Grisha would go no more into the attack, would enter no more towns, liberate no more villages, make no more forced marches. It was not he who had destroyed the enemy tanks the communiqué

reported, not he who had taken those German prisoners of which the figures were given, not he who had captured the guns the announcer's voice spoke about.

"Beryozovka..."

No, it was not that Beryozovka. Their Beryozovka, that happy place where they had met, where they had fallen in love for ever and for ever, had long been freed, already several months ago. There were many Beryozovkas—other ones, strange ones. But there was only one where Grisha's merry voice had sounded, where his swift steps had rung out on the roads, and where in the evenings his favourite song had been heard in the garden—"The dark hills are sleeping..."

She bowed her head over her folded hands and ceased listening to the communiqué. It was no longer speaking about the front. Somewhere factories were working, somewhere collective farmers were toiling, there were people who received Orders, somewhere far, far away. But here, in the room, where nobody had thought to turn on the light, there was only Grisha and his song of the lad, the young fellow who came from the Don steppes. The song rang out in Grisha's voice, his merry, velvety voice, the only one in the world. She could hear it distinctly, not only the words, but every modulation and inflection, every variation of the melody. The voice poured out of the darkness, vibrated, filled the whole world. Just as it had been formerly, when she had felt that this song just fitted Grisha, the song of the merry young fellow, who came out of the broad Don steppes for a great, important cause, for bustling happy work. And the blustering wind swept over his temples, rejoicing in his strength, his youth and gaiety. It was of himself that Grisha sang, the words and melody embodied him.

The song rang out, swelled, flooded the world. Grisha's song, Grisha's song...

Slippers shuffled in the next room. A door creaked.

"Why are you sitting here in the dark? Has he gone?"

A bright light flooded the room.

"I missed the communiqué, I thought he was still sitting here. What was there in it?"

Maria tried to remember, but in vain.

The train stopped at the little station. Maria climbed out without saying good-bye to Vorontsov. He watched her moving along the muddy road, past the ruins of the completely wrecked station, until the train moved. She seemed to him so little, deserted, hopeless in the grey, foggy waste. He dashed to the door, but the coaches were already grinding and creaking, and the train moved off.

Maria wandered along slowly, dragging her feet with difficulty in the sticky mud of this strange frostless winter. Patches of mist drifted over the naked fields. With hoarse cries, a flock of crows flew past:

and still cawing, settled on the ground beyond the forest of low spruce. Maria looked around her. Grey, a hopeless, grey world. It was not raining, but the air was raw, and a cold moisture gathered on her face.

Some tall pine trees rose before her. The road swung round.

Now Maria could see the first building, a small factory. Once upon a time the rumble and sound of it had been clearly audible in the settlement. A piercing whistle had awakened the people in the morning, warned them of the dinner hour. She wanted to smile a greeting to it, as if it were a dear old friend.

But there was no factory. Among the pines a strange shape stood out, like the skeleton of some prehistoric monster. The building had not been completely demolished by the shells—the steel girders and iron supports, the strong skeleton clothed in concrete and cement still stood. But the bomb explosions and the blast had crushed and distorted the floors, the workshops, had wrenched off the roof, shattered the walls, just as though the factory building had been a child's plasticine toy. The grey of the walls supported the illusion of some fantastic mammoth, some mysterious animal, huge and formless, that had hidden itself in the spruce forest.

Maria's heart sank. Here, in this building which was now no building, Grisha, the engineer, had begun his work. Here he had run from floor to floor and carefully watched the machines working, the breathing of their mighty lungs, the pressure in the boilers, the racing wheels, the hissing of the bands.

Dirty-grey patches of snow lay along the ditches. Streams of water had trickled from them, washing them away underneath, melting them, breaking them up. Drops of water trembled on the naked bushes. Drops of water fell from the spruce branches into the broad puddles and the horrible, sour mud.

Here, once upon a time had been a gay, happy summer when the spruce branches were bathed in golden sunlight, and Grisha, coming to meet her, had stirred the dust of the blinding white road with his high boots.

The pine trees became smaller, more scanty, thinned into a low wood, a sparse shaggy growth that gave a clear view of the horizon.

But on the horizon nothing was visible. A grey, ragged fog, a grey, rain-filled sky, and every now and then a flock of crows flapping heavily past.

Now in a moment there would be the school, a tall white building with columns.

But there was no school. There was only a pile of rubble, scattered bricks and black splashes of ash.

The strange thought occurred to Maria that perhaps she had lost the way. She had got out at the wrong station, taken the wrong road, come into some strange settlement where she had never been before and which had already ceased to exist.

But it was not so. True, the station had

been razed to the ground, but somebody had written the familiar name on a board and fastened it to a scorched pillar.

She moved along as though in a dream, trying to find something familiar, straining after some known spot. Somewhere here that little cottage had been. Here it was that she first met Grisha. He had been standing beside the fence, tall, bright-headed, and asking his way. A deaf old woman who lived in the house had been trying to understand what he wanted. She cupped her hand round her ear, pushed back the dirty shawl that looked as though it were never changed, but all in vain. Grisha had laughed and shouted right into her ear.

Maria had come out onto the path from some raspberry bushes, walked up to the fence and explained the road to him. She remembered the look of his large sunburnt hand on the fence, as clearly as though it were there before her. She could distinctly see even the fingers—the middle one with a white scar which struck her eye. Some incomprehensible childish curiosity had made her want to ask what had caused the scar. She had even blushed, thinking that he might sense her curiosity. He had looked at her with his merry eyes—yes, every thing about Grisha was merry, his smile, his eyes, his gait, his voice. The first thing one noticed about him was that seething, overflowing gaiety.

That was how it had begun—the love “at first sight,” that silly novels used to write about. But evidently it could happen in real life as well. Here was a case in point. Grisha had forgotten in a flash all about the road he had been seeking, he had not even waited to go round through the wicket gate but had jumped right over the fence.

Could it be that there was no trace left of that fence? With cold, wet fingers she rooted among the wreckage. Sharp broken edges of bricks tore and cut her hands. Was there not even a fragment, not a scrap of wood by which her heart would inevitably recognize it? Cinders, broken bricks, scorched fragments of something, indistinguishable fragments. Dumb and cold.

Maria rose and went back. Again the little bridge—how many times they had crossed those three swaying planks together. She stared greedily at the mud-covered wood, as though hoping still to find some trace of Grisha's footprints there. But hundreds of heavy German boots had passed here since, and stamped out, erased, destroyed forever every trace of Grisha.

She was shivering with cold. Her teeth chattered. It was only now that she felt her feet were wet, her coat damp, her face numb. Slowly she dragged herself along the road to the station. “Like a funeral,” the thought occurred to her. She had not been at Grisha's funeral, and for that matter, how could she have been there? He had died the death of the brave, and who could say where he was lying? Perhaps he had been blown to pieces? Perhaps there was nothing left of him ex-

cept a handful of ashes where one could with difficulty seek the remains of a man?

Yes, it was here that she had buried him, in the place of their young, happy love.

The mud squelched under her feet. Again a flock of crows rose heavily, and like torn rags carried by the wind, flapped through the air and sank again.

She walked with difficulty, without looking where she was stepping. A penetrating drizzle had begun. With her lips she caught some of the drops beating against her face and was surprised at their salty taste. Blood was seeping from her cracked lips. She glanced at her hands and saw blood on her fingers where she had scratched and cut them on the fragments of brick. Whose blood was that? Grigori's? No, it was not his, she had not bandaged Grisha. Not only she—nobody had helped him, nobody had saved him, because there had been no help to be had. It was not of wounds he had died, he had "died the death of the brave,"—yes, that was what had been written. He had died there on the field of battle, for his country and for Stalin.

At the station people looked at her in surprise. The train was due in an hour, so she sat down on the solitary, shaky bench and waited patiently, staring fixedly at one point on the ground. Vorontsov jumped out of the train; she saw him at once, he was the only passenger who alighted. She let him take her to the coach, without noticing his horrified look.

"Maria, you're wet through, and there's blood on your hands!"

She looked down at her hands. Then up at him. Glanced round to see if anybody was listening to them, but it was getting dark in the coach, and all the other passengers were dozing. She bent over to him and as though it were some secret, whispered in his ear:

"You know, Grisha really is dead..."

He took her icy hand and pressed it, held it in his.

"Maria, Maria, do you mean to say that up to now..."

He did not finish his sentence. She could see fear in his near-sighted eyes.

She shook her head. No, she had not gone mad. It was only that until today she had still not been able to realize what had happened. It was not that she had not believed it, but the meaning of the notice had not penetrated fully to her understanding. It was only now, in this settlement which no longer existed, among these surviving willows that she had buried Grisha, realized the meaning of the words which she had already read a hundred times with unseeing eyes: "died the death of the brave."

She smiled uncertainly, staring out into the darkness. The coach swayed and creaked.

"There's a telegram for you," said Tatyana Petrovna.

"A telegram? Who from?"

"I didn't look. It's on your table."

Without any haste, Maria took off her

gloves and coat. Somebody wiring to know how one of her patients was getting on, of course, and sure to be one who was in a bad way—that was how it usually was. It was as though they—these mothers, wives, sisters—could sense it hundreds of miles off, as though in some mysterious way the alarm was carried to them that their loved one was going, that in the fight with death he had lost.

But she herself had felt nothing, known nothing until the notice had come. How, then, could she believe in presentiments? Grisha had been with her, had been there all the time, had never left her for an instant; she had felt his presence, heard his voice, seen his smile. And the whole time it had been all wrong—he had been already dead at the time when she had still been so confident and certain.

She tore open the telegram, her eyes scanned the written lines—narrow, unevenly pasted strips of paper—but she understood nothing of them. Read it again, a chill ran over her, she shivered all over.

"Do you want some tea?" asked her mother from the other room. She did not answer. She was holding the telegram with its incredible words that she could not understand.

■ Tatyana Petrovna's worn slippers flapped and shuffled into the room.

"What's the matter? What's the telegram about?"

She looked at her mother unseeingly.

"Who's it from, then?" asked the old woman sulkily.

"A telegram... a telegram..."

She straightened the crumpled paper again. Then her voice catching, stumblingly, unevenly, she read:

"Grigori Ivapovich is wounded and in our hospital. Sonya."

The old woman tore the telegram out of her hands. Read it through again in a whisper and burst into tears.

"Alive, alive, alive!"

She ran hastily into the other room, paying no attention to her daughter. It was for her that Grigori had risen from the dead, for her that he had returned to the living, that was her affair and only hers at the moment. Maria could hear her loudly whispering prayers. Oh, of course, that would be the first thing she would think about—to fall on her knees before the ikon and pray.

Maria read the telegram through again. From the beginning of the war Sonya had been working in a hospital in the far rear. How could Grisha have got there, when the notice had come from the front? With the exception of her friend's signature, she could understand nothing at all.

She took the notice of her husband's death out of a drawer and read it through carefully. There was no doubt about it, it was a death notice. And it was not from any hospital, but right from his unit. What was it all about, then? They would surely know there better than Sonya... What had Sonya to do with it, anyhow?

She pressed her hands to her temples, afraid, desperately afraid to repeat the word

her mother had said, or even to let it enter her mind, that word—alive. Because later it would turn out, it would certainly turn out that it had been a mistake, some sort of stupid misunderstanding.

Tatyana Petrovna returned to the room, beaming. She looked at her daughter with disapproval.

"What's the matter with you now? Standing there like a post or something. Why, Grisha's alive!"

"I don't know," whispered Maria with difficulty. "I don't know anything..."

"But the telegram, the telegram?"

There were two pieces of paper on the table, two crumpled papers. The announcement of death and the announcement of life. Which one should she believe? Which one could she believe?

"I don't understand anything at all," she said dully. Somewhere in the depths of her heart a joy, a sudden spark, had flashed up, ready to spring into flame. But Maria stifled the faint spark, did not allow it to burn up. It would be too cruel, too dreadful—to lose Grisha twice; her heart was sore, as though it had been wounded, and feared everything—both pain and joy, because the joy might prove the more cruel anguish.

"What's there to understand? He's in the hospital there. Why, Sonya..."

"Yes, yes... But how could Sonya know about Grigori?"

A sudden thought flashed through her mind. She looked at the address. No, the telegram was addressed to her.

She fussed about the room, took up her gloves.

"Where are you going?"

"I've got to go, I've got to go... I've got to talk it over, get some advice..."

"Vorontsov again?"

"Yes, yes. Vorontsov..."

Of course, who else would she go to for advice? Some normal person must read it, say what he thought, explain everything, or she would surely go mad...

"You're not going anywhere. You're just crazy, that's what! Only just come home from work, looking like nothing on earth, and off you want to go again! I'll go and ask the yardman to send his lad to fetch your Vorontsov, if you can't live another moment without him! And you stay where you are!"

To her own surprise,—Maria obeyed. Perhaps because she felt that her strength had given out. Her legs had suddenly become weak, helpless, as though the bones had been taken out of them. She sank onto a chair. The room was swaying, whirling round her.

Obediently she drank her tea, it burned her lips, but she felt nothing. On the table the two papers were lying, and she could not tear her eyes from them. Which of them held the truth, which of them decided her fate?

The date! The thought came in a blinding flash. She knew the date of the notice. She had repeated it a thousand times. That date which lay like a deep cleft, a bottomless gully between her past and pres-

ent life, which rose like a wall reaching to the heavens between other days and these. But the telegram?

Numbers, numbers, numbers. A whole line of them. What did they mean, how could she decipher them, how understand what they meant? What date was it today? She tried to remember, but her thoughts refused to obey her, flickered and drifted like torn wisps of fog driven by the wind. What day was it? What month? What year, for that matter? With difficulty she remembered the year. Yes, of course...

"What more do you think you can get out of it, going on reading it over and over?"

"The date... I can't find it."

"Let me see it."

Tatyana Petrovna balanced the glasses in their metal frame on her nose. Yes, again she had neglected to get a new frame, it was still fastened with white thread. How could she go on forgetting it like that! On the way to the hospital she would go on repeating to herself: glasses, glasses... And then all her duties and daily cares at the hospital would sweep it out of her mind...

"Whatever am I thinking about?" Maria thought, starting. "When Grisha..."

"Wait, there's something here... Aha... No, I don't know... They write down a lot of figures and you can rack your brains to know what they all mean... But what does it matter to you, anyway? Here's the telegram, that's enough, even if it has taken a long time on the way, that happens often enough, even a letter comes quicker. If she'd had the sense to send a letter, now, we'd have known more. This way, all we know is that he's alive."

The bell rang sharply, Tatyana Petrovna hastened to open the door.

"What's happened, Maria?"

Vorontsov was out of breath; he had evidently run all the way, and now he had to wipe the moisture from his forehead with his handkerchief.

"There's a telegram come! Grigori's alive! He's wounded, he's in hospital!" Tatyana Petrovna told him, the words falling over each other in her haste; she had quite forgotten for the moment her antipathy for the young doctor.

"Grigori? Alive?"

"Come here, quick, come here!... A telegram..."

Without greeting him, Maria handed him the paper.

"But what is all this, Maria?"

Maria had given him the death notice by mistake.

"No, you needn't think I've gone crazy. It's not that one. Here, here..."

He carefully read the telegram.

"Look. Look, and see what date it is... I can't understand anything..."

His hands were trembling slightly. His eyes flew over the words several times.

"Maria, I want you to believe me, that I'm happy, I'm very happy!"

What was he talking about? What did he and his feelings matter to her? There was only one thing that she needed.

"The date, look, what date was it sent? I can't make it out."

"Take it easy, Maria. We'll clear it all up. See, the date..."

"What?" she interrupted him, her heart beating with a terrible agitation.

"The date is earlier..."

Maria seemed turned to stone. Vorontsov's voice seemed to come from somewhere far, far away. That meant, then...

"But that makes no difference... That's a notice... And this is a hospital... Evidently there was some kind of mistake, the date makes no difference here, it makes no difference at all..."

"I keep on telling her and telling her, but she just sits there as though she'd lost her wits. Of course, you can't expect her old mother to know anything..." Tatyana Petrovna interrupted with some irritation.

"Victor... I've got to know for certain. You must understand, I've got to know..."

"Well, and what's all the bother about? Take the train and go there—that's all you have to do! Why, he's lying there wounded," said the mother indignantly.

"No, she can't go off all in a minute like that," Vorontsov demurred. "We'll send a telegram to the head surgeon. Find out how the land really lies."

"Yes, yes, so as to be certain..."

She began nervously fussing about the room.

"Now where on earth is my suitcase?"

"What do you need your suitcase for? You're not going right now... Lord a mercy, what are people coming to nowadays, I'd like to know; don't know what they're about half the time, everything upside down, don't know how to mourn in a decent fashion and don't know how to be glad when there's cause for it."

She shrugged her shoulders and moved heavily into the kitchen. They could hear her angrily banging the saucepans about, and grumbling to herself.

"I don't know... I don't know anything... If only I could believe it..."

"Take it easy, Maria. We'll wire, and there'll be a reply in a day or two. I'll send the telegram to the chief surgeon. I know him personally."

"But if..."

"We won't think about that just now. Don't torment yourself, we can't know anything now... Although somehow I don't think Kozlova's mistaken. Most probably he was picked up by Red Cross men from some other unit and taken to hospital. That sort of things happens sometimes."

"Victor, but if during this time..."

He did not understand her.

"What?"

"No, nothing, it's nothing..."

It was impossible, she could not say it, but all the time the same thought kept returning obstinately to her mind—Sonya had not been mistaken, Grisha had really been in the hospital, he had not been dead. But now he had really died, died before she had received that telegram which had come to her by God knew what circuitous route. Died not on the day named in the

notice, but yesterday, today, he was lying dead in the hospital at this moment, he would die tomorrow, and again everything would become a black void, a deep pit, a boundless, endless desert where she would have to wander on and on, without aim or object in life.

"Two or three days' patience, and we shall know everything," said Vorontsov, and Maria quietened down. His calm words suddenly filled her with confidence. There was so much assurance ringing through them.

"And then you will go to him, or else he will be brought here. We'll have to see what's best to be done. Besides wiring, I'll try to put through a long-distance call to the hospital. That would be the best of all. I'll try to get through."

To think that she had not thought of that for herself! The telephone! The words would travel swiftly along the wire, and everything would be clear at once! And suppose, suppose Grigori himself... To hear his voice from that distant town. Grigori's voice...

Vorontsov left, and Maria sat there, her chin supported on her hands, without the strength to tear her eyes away from the papers, one of which brought death, the other—life.

The world was filled with red fog. In this scarlet haze Captain Chernov wandered, knowing nothing of what was happening. Only one thing he did know, firmly realized—that he must lose himself. He must lose himself in the vast expanses of his country, plunge into its crowded millions of people, cease for ever to be Grigori Chernov.

The continuous, monotonous beat of the hospital train wheels said: "must, must, must." They confirmed it, agreed with it. A good thing that his papers were lost, evidently they had been left there, on the plain by the gully, where he had spent a day and night among the killed, until careful hands had drawn him away from the stinking corpses and laid him on a sledge. A good thing that then, when he himself was incapable of speech, there had been no papers to speak for him.

A hospital smell mixed with the sickly-sweet odour of chloroform and the sharp flash of the surgeon's glasses, as he sunk into the depth of forgetfulness.

And again the rumble of the wheels—wheels that were telling him something he could not clearly understand, like a formless presentiment of what was to come and the world swaying and melting before his eyes. But at last everything fell into place. The hospital ward and the hospital bed, the unknown snow-covered mountains outside the window. And now Captain Chernov had to tell himself: "I shall never return to the front. I have lost an arm, my leg is shattered, and something strange has happened to my face."

"What is the matter with my face?" he asked the young nurse grimly as she gave him his medicine.

"Burns and wounds; it'll all soon heal

up," she said casually. But he could not still his uneasiness. The bandages were in his way, but from beneath them he carefully studied her expression.

"Just an ordinary wound. Lie quiet, soon it'll all heal up."

He could feel a sharp, penetrating pain in the right side of his face. But he could feel the same sharp pain in the arm which was not there. He looked at the white, smooth quilt. Where his arm should have been, there was a hollow — nothing there. And all the same it hurt. His arm ached abominably, kept him awake at night. What could the nurse say, how could he believe her, if his own body could lie to him, if an arm was aching when it was not there?

He asked no more questions of either the nurse or the doctor, but waited for his chance.

Here was the nurse glancing furtively at a little pocket mirror as she went to the door. All the wounded men knew that she was in love with the doctor, and he was about due any moment now. But that was not what mattered, the important thing was that the mirror had disappeared into the pocket of her white overall.

"Nurse, I'm thirsty, give me a drink, please. No from that side, please!"

She would notice, she was sure to notice it. Ask her? No, she'd not give it to him, she'd guess why he wanted it.

"The bandage, the bandage, see, just here, nurse, at the side..."

The nurse leaned over the bed. Swiftly, cautiously, his fingers slid into the pocket. There it was. A tiny round mirror, cool and smooth. That would not lie, would not deceive him.

"Your bandage hasn't slipped at all..."

"Hasn't it? I thought it had..."

The nurse went away.

Now he only had to choose his moment. And that very day, chance favoured him. Neither the nurse nor the doctor was in the ward. His neighbour was asleep—he slept all the time, waking only for meals or for rebandaging.

The little round mirror was terribly frank. There was an eye crushed in, mutilated, not his own. Captain Chernov looked seriously, searchingly. The wound was healing, evidently the cheekbone had been smashed. Scars and fissures would remain. But nobody now could change what he saw in the round mirror—a mutilated repulsive eye which seemed literally out of place. This eye glared strangely, with a kind of fierce, unnatural expression.

Carefully Grigori moved the bandage back to its former position. All that had been misty and illusive had become clear and distinct. The train wheels had spoken the truth, confirming the decision that had not yet been clear even to himself. That was how it must be, that and nothing else.

The endlessly long days in the hospital dragged by. Bandaging, medicine, thermometers—all this reminded him continually of reality, spoke clearly of actual facts. Disabled—said the steps in the corridor.

Disabled—said the neighbour's snores. Disabled—rattled the passing trams.

"Where is your family?" an inquisitive nurse once asked him. And clearly and plainly, Captain Chernov replied:

"I have no family."

But a longing stole over him, silently and stealthily. For the sunshine of the only smile in the world. For bright hair, light as flax, for a characteristic bend of the head. Ah, if she could only come, lean over his bed; only to see her close to him, to look straight into her faithful eyes! A soft whisper from the lips he had so often kissed. A soft, tender hand passed over his forehead.

"I shan't give in," he told his longing. It tiptoed around his bed with light, inaudible steps, and they were the footsteps of Maria. It whispered to him in Maria's voice. Memories flooded his mind, all those days came to life again in the hospital ward, beginning with the hour when he had seen her in the little town, beyond the fence, in the raspberry bushes, with a blue kerchief on her head. But now there was no longer any Engineer Chernov, there was only a disabled man lying on a hospital bed.

What could he give her now? Tie her down forever to his mutilated life? Bring an everlasting gloom into her clear eyes, wipe away her smile and still the song her trusting lips had sung? No, better the way it was—he would not return, and she would have the bright, clear memory of him who had loved her and who had given his life for his country.

Then she would be able to start a new life—but pain gripped his heart at the thought that those rosy lips could smile at another, that her eyes could look into other eyes, knowing no faithlessness. But that was how it must be, yes, that was how it must be.

"I am not deceiving you, my darling, but I will not poison your youth, my shining one, I will not burden you, tie you down for ever to a cripple," said Captain Chernov through lips dry and burning with fever.

This fever was his main enemy. Its fire seemed to melt his will-power, its flames burned the strength from his heart. Enticing pictures would rise before his eyes—just stretch out his hand, and everything would be as it had been. Nothing to struggle for, nothing to deny himself—how could it be that the words that had gone from heart to heart, the pledges, the vows, could lose their strength and life? How could they disappear without a trace, those two years of life together, in a union which had been like a song, like happiness itself?

What was it that had changed? He was alive, he was still the same man whom she had loved, to whom she had spoken of love. What had changed, then?—whispered his treacherous longing. Now, too, there were the two of them, Maria and Grigori, just as before, just as formerly.

The fever brought her to him, her beloved shape materialized in the late

winter dawn, the early winter dusk. That was not the light of the lamp, it was Maria's shining hair. That was not the nurse talking, it was Maria's voice.

"It's the fever, it's only the fever," Grigori excused himself, and in the evening, when his temperature began to rise, he would gladly sink into that world, the world of the dreams. Like a thief, he would slip down from the high wall, from the iron resolution of his own will, forged from his own decision, into the rosy garden of dreams, the happy valley of love.

But then his temperature would fall, and remorse would seize him. Where had his will-power gone, his unfaltering resolution? But all the same the dream would return, persistent, irresistible. Until a new day dawned.

A new nurse appeared in the dressing theatre. Quite young, almost a child. Evidently she had only just begun working. "Take off the bandages," said the doctor, and deft hands began swiftly stripping them from Grigori's head.

He looked up to her. A round, innocent face. She did her work with amusing seriousness, concentrating all her attention on it. She had not yet acquired the skill that comes with practice, but made up for it by minute carefulness and attention, all of which was reflected on her face.

The last bandage came off. And Grigori saw fear and repulsion on the young face. Just for an instant. Then the round cheeks flamed with shame, tears even rose into her eyes. The whole thing lasted only for a flash—but Grigori had seen it.

Later on, lying on his bed, he laughed angrily and scornfully. This was what he was wanting to offer Maria—a face become hideous. A face which roused fear and repulsion. To make her look at him and remember how often she had said: "I love your eyes, I love your eyes most of all."

Now, even when his fever ran high, Captain Chernov never slipped down from his high wall, his iron resolution. Let the rose-garden bloom, he would not allow himself even to glance in through the gate.

And now he was in another hospital. More new surroundings. Another step into the thick of the crowd, into the depths of his own country.

One morning Captain Chernov heard a familiar voice in the corridor. He started. Whose voice was that? Low, contralto. Yes, there was no doubt about it, he had heard that voice somewhere.

"Who is that?"

His neighbour, sitting on his bed, did not understand him.

"Out there, in the corridor?"

"Ah, that? That's our nurse, Sonya Kozlova."

He had an irresistible impulse to run away. But he could not even get up and walk. He was a cripple, with only one arm, with a lame leg, helpless, requiring

assistance from another, the support of a shoulder, the care of other hands.

And suddenly he realized—what a fool you are, what a fool, how can Sonya Kozlova ever know you? Now, remember—and remember it once for all—realize it once and for all: you are no longer the Engineer Chernov whom she knew. You are a stump of a man, lying helplessly on your bed, your face covered in a thick layer of bandages. No, she could not possibly recognize him.

All the same, his heart beat faster when the door opened. It was she—Sonya Kozlova. She had not changed since he last had seen her. It was just as though she had come from Maria, as though Sonya's nurse's overall still held some of her perfume, her eyes still preserved her image. Maria's friend... She had been with Maria after Grigori had left. She knew, of course, how she was now. If he could only ask after her health! How many months was it that he had heard nothing of her? With a sudden start of surprise Grigori realized that it had never entered his head that something might have happened to Maria, that she might be ill. He had always seen her glowing with health and strength, gay and indefatigable. But it might be different now. After all, it was war-time, not an easy time for anyone.

Now she was approaching, threading her way between the beds. Just call "Sonya," quite quietly even—and she would turn hurriedly. He would be able to ask everything, find out all he wanted to know.

He bit his lips and looked attentively at the girl. But he should not stare at her so fixedly. One can sense another person's regard. Her attention would be attracted to this particular wounded man who was staring at her. It would make her begin to think. And suppose there was still something in him of the former Chernov, something that could catch her observant woman's eye?

He made a great effort and turned away his eyes. But all the time he could see her. Now she was approaching, coming nearer and nearer. He could not help looking at her, following her with his eyes. She was a greeting from Maria, the caress of her hand sent from afar, the smile of her lips. And suddenly a crazy thought flashed through his mind—suppose she really were sent by Maria? She had found him out somehow, sought him out in the jungle of hospital lists and sent Sonya on ahead—and now, at any moment, she might enter herself?

What nonsense! Sonya was simply working here, that was clear enough. What would a nurse be doing if not working in a hospital?

The girl came up to him and placed his medicine on the table.

"How do you feel after your journey?"

His voice! His voice had not changed. All was lost. It had all been for nothing, his long struggle with himself, his nights of torment, his fathomless despair before the persistence of his dreams.

"All right, quite well," he said with difficulty, and himself failed to recognize his own voice, although at that moment he felt quite incapable of deliberately disguising it. The nurse moved on. He sighed with relief, but at the same time felt a strange sorrow. Just as though he had lost something, just as though something had disappeared for ever.

She walked down the ward, giving the men their medicine. Three more beds, two more, one—and that was the end. She went out, stepping lightly, as though afraid of awakening someone.

Now he was continually awaiting her. She was a bond, a link with Maria, she carried the memory of her. Perhaps she had seen her recently, there might even be a letter from Maria in her overall pocket. Grigori began reckoning the days according to Sonya Kozlova's duty and those of the other nurses. Sonya Kozlova's days had a different colour. They were filled with disturbance, a tantalizing fascination. His heart contracted every time she approached. True, she did not resemble Maria in the least. A thin, plain girl with nondescript-coloured hair. The only beautiful thing about her were her soft brown eyes. Eyes that had seen Maria. But all the same, the two girls had something in common. Perhaps it was the light step and a kind of solicitous care in every movement that was characteristic of Maria when tending her patients.

She noticed nothing, suspected nothing. After a few days he felt quite easy in his mind. She would not recognize him, could not recognize him. There was nothing left in him of the man that had been. He was quite different now, and even if Maria...

What a crazy, ridiculous idea, as though Maria might fail to recognize him! But after all, Sonya had been merely an acquaintance. How could it ever enter her head that this wounded man, bandaged from head to foot, was the man she had known, the exuberant engineer Chernov, Captain Chernov, who had remained on the battlefield on that raw, damp winter day?

And today the nurse, handing him his medicine, asked suddenly:

"You were an engineer before the war, weren't you?"

He froze, cold chills ran down him from head to foot. But he mustn't start, mustn't show any confusion. Staring at the ceiling, he replied unconcernedly:

"An engineer? Why? No... I was in the army..."

She did not insist.

How had it happened? Chance? A guess? He did not look at her until she had left his bed. Pretended not to see her when she appeared in the ward. But all the time he watched her, unobtrusively, followed her with a suspicious, searching gaze, observed her every movement.

The wounded men were writing letters. She stopped by Chernov's bed.

"Perhaps you want to write a letter?"

He looked surprised.

"A letter? No, thank you. Whom should I write to?"

"Perhaps there is somebody who is waiting for a letter from you," she said in calm, even tones.

Now what was all this? A cross-examination? A trap? A demand?

"There's nobody waiting for a letter from me," he jerked out curtly.

"You never can tell, you never can tell," she said significantly.

"Please leave me alone, I'm tired," he growled ungraciously.

She smiled and went away.

For the next two days everything went on as usual. He watched her incessantly from afar, and pretended to be asleep whenever she approached. Inwardly alert, he awaited events.

Now here she was threading her way again between the beds, thin, dark-haired. Her walk like Maria's. A special walk—quiet, careful. That was how Maria walked, as long as she was in the hospital building—he had noticed it at once, the first time he had come to take her home from work.

Now Sonya was here. She stood beside him and handed him a thermometer.

And then, very quietly:

"You must send word to Maria, Grisha."

The bed seemed to sway beneath him as though he were on a ship at sea. With difficulty he succeeded in drawing some air into his lungs. Something had to be done, or else all was lost.

"What, nurse? What was that you said?"

"You heard me perfectly well, Grisha, don't pretend, please."

"But my name isn't Grigori at all, nurse, you know that very well."

"Oh, yes, of course—Andrei Georgievich Korchin," said Sonya scoffingly. Then she bent down over him. "You mustn't go on this way, Grisha. It's all wrong."

"Please let me alone, nurse. Are you crazy, or what?"

Sonya shrugged her shoulders and went. But Grigori realized that all was lost. She wasn't to be deceived. She knew everything, just as though they had discussed it all, through the long sleepless nights.

Again her turn of duty came round. Grigori was irritated and cross.

"I used to have the highest respect for you, Grigori," Sonya told him calmly. "But now I see that you aren't worth it. There's nothing big about you."

Vorontsov strode up and down his office, waiting for the telephone call. The green-shaded lamp shed a feeble light in the room.

This meant then, that most probably Grigori was alive; he ought to feel glad of that, he ought to be feeling a sincere, deep joy, both for Grigori and Maria. That is what any decent man ought to be feeling. But he could not find joy within himself. He had felt a flash of it the first second when he had heard the unexpected news, but then it had vanished, and all his efforts to bring it back again, to whip it up, were in vain.

"I'm a cad," he repeated through tightly

clenched teeth, but that did not help either. "Again I have to lose you," he said aloud, and glanced over his shoulder in alarm. But the door was closed, and nobody could be there at that hour.

Yes, it was no good trying to turn his thoughts to something else, they harked back obstinately to the same thing—he would have to lose Maria again. This was the second time in his life that Grigori had come between them, and she turned to him. Again the old wounds would be torn open, those wounds which had seemed already healed and painless; again his life's blood would begin to flow. Maria—the student at the nurses' training school, bright-haired Maria, whom he had noticed the very first day—yes, and not many more days had passed before he had been forced to realize that he was in love. For her part, she had noticed nothing at that time—the distance between lecturer and student precluded the very idea that any tender feeling for her could arise in him. Ah, how hard it had been for him, watching her clear eyes looking attentively into his, and seeing not the man, but only the doctor, the specialist; noting her close attention, and seeing how hard she tried—so very young, so very serious. And then she had gone to Beryozovka, on her first job. How many times he had made up his mind to go there, to tell her all! He wrote her a short letter. She replied. But it was in vain that he sought for something in her letter beyond mere friendship. He wrote several times again, just ordinary non-committal letters, and received the same kind of answers.

Then Grigori appeared, and that was the end of everything. He had known Grigori previously, had sometimes met him—but never had it entered his head that this fair-haired engineer would stand in his path, that it was just he who would win the smile which Vorontsov had never succeeded in gaining, and Maria's words of love, her heart. Why had it to be Grigori and not himself?

Friendship—oh, that friendship, both deep and sincere, and yet at the same time somehow unreal, when they came here, a newly wedded pair, and he used to visit them. It was then, too, that Maria had begun to use that slightly condescending tone. Condescending? Perhaps just motherly. And the sharp suffering of those first days faded into an aching, slowly dying sadness, became a habit, like some old scar.

Then Grigori had left for the front, and Maria's attitude to Vorontsov had changed. He was necessary to her, he was no longer the teddy-bear. Now he could permit himself to assume a protective tone, and Maria did not protest. She needed him as a friend, someone close to her. She found the loneliness too hard.

They drew closer together. Vorontsov never deceived himself—as a man, he did not exist for her. Her whole world was contained in Grigori, he was everything for her. She felt everything through Grigori, as it were, and for Grigori. The war, her

work in the hospital, everything was linked with him, filled with his personality. But even that was something akin to happiness—to see her, to be her friend.

Somewhere, in the depths of his heart, there was hidden an unconscious hope that all this might change, that he might come to be the person nearest to her. How could it happen? Of that he never thought. Even in the most gloomy, tormenting nights the thought of Grigori's death never even occurred to him. But Grigori was far away, and it seemed it would always be like that. And the necessary person, the person she could not do without might come to be him, instead of Grigori.

And now it was all over. He clenched his fists in loathing and contempt for himself.

"Cad, cad, cad!" repeated Vorontsov through his clenched teeth, as though striking himself in the face. But again the pain welled up. "Now I shall lose you, now I shall lose you," groaned his heart. "The joy of life, its happiness and bliss, its sun-filled colour."

The piercing, prolonged ring of the telephone.

"Hallo!"

There was a jarring and crackling in the instrument. Fragments of talk could be heard, hasty voices, interrupting each other.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

The instrument crackled again and became silent.

"Vorontsov, this is Vorontsov speaking. Is that you, Sasha?"

A changed distorted voice at the other end of the wire was trying to shout above the noise.

"Victor? Yes, it's me. What's the matter?"

"Sasha, listen, Sasha! Hallo, hallo, yes, yes, we're still speaking! Sasha, is Captain Chernov in your hospital?"

"What's that, what?"

"Chernov, Chernov!" Quickly he spelt it out letter by letter.

"Chernov?"

"Yes, yes."

"Wait a minute. I'll find out. Wait, I'll phone up from a different place."

Vorontsov waited patiently. Disjointed words and phrases were carried to him from afar, as though out of some deep gulf. Somewhere on the line, telephone operators were quarrelling. Somewhere a morse apparatus tapped incessantly.

"Chernov?"

"Yes, yes."

"Initials?"

"G. I.—Grigori Ivanovich."

"No, he's not here. We've got Chernyshev, Chernik, Chernyakov—and that's all."

"No, no, it's impossible," Vorontsov shouted desperately into the instrument. "It's impossible! Two months ago he was there! Two months ago."

"Wait a moment, I'll find out."

Again noise, crackling hiccups. He was afraid that he might not hear the reply.

"There's never been anyone of that name here, at least not this year."

"But we've had a telegram, a telegram, he must be there!"

"Are you still talking?"

"Don't cut us off, operator! We're talking! We're talking! There's been a telegram, a telegram!"

"Did I send it myself?"

"No, no, nurse Sonya Kozlova, Kozlova!"

"Kozlova? She's working here."

"Ask her, ask Kozlova!"

'Again the noise of the wires. And at last a barely audible voice through the chaos of sound:

"She's not here today, it's her day off."

Vorontsov dropped the receiver on the hook. It was only later he realized that he had not even said thank you, and worst of all, had come to no conclusion, cleared nothing up.

The telephone bell rang sharply.

"Have you finished?"

"Yes, yes," he said wearily.

He felt deadly tired. And what was he to tell Maria, when she asked him next day?

"I'll tell her that I didn't get through," he decided.

"Why don't you go to bed?"

With a sigh Maria rose and turned out the light. How strange her mother was! First of all scolding her for being unfeeling, and then wanting her to sleep, to sleep on this night when everything was being decided.

She tiptoed to the window and moved aside the thick paper covering it. She felt herself choking in the little room. She wanted to go out, to breathe the cool air, to feel the blustering wind on her face, the beating of its damp wings. But it was already late, too late to go out wandering in the rain. Besides, Vorontsov might appear any moment. She had to pull herself together and wait.

She thought she heard a bell. She held her breath, but next moment realized that it was a mistake. There had been no bell, it was her own ears that were ringing. How long was it since Vorontsov had gone? Perhaps he had already found out something? But what—good or bad? If it were bad... Then he was sitting there now, and wondering what to say to her, how to tell her that the mirage was gone, that she must return to the gloom, to that cold dark world in which Grisha was not. He would postpone it, try to put her off.

How interminably the time dragged! How long was it—minutes or hours? Should she go and see? But that would mean going into her mother's room, she would awaken and begin to scold again. Nothing to be done, she would have to wait in patience.

A bed creaked in the neighbouring room. Tatyana Petrovna yawned loudly, and Maria could hear her joints cracking. Then shuffling steps. Tatyana Petrovna glanced into the room, drawing a woolen shawl over her thin shoulders.

"You're up already? It's early yet."

"I have to be at the hospital earlier today," said Maria, smoothing her hair with her hand. Yes, it never entered her mother's head that she might not have been to bed at all.

Water gushed from the tap in the kitchen. Tatyana Petrovna put on the kettle. Maria glanced at her exhausted, dull face in the mirror. From the photograph Grisha's face looked out at her, young, merry, invincible. She sighed. Now she, was almost convinced that Sonya's telegram was just some stupid misunderstanding. It was the first paper that had told the truth—the official notice.

Telephone calls, telegrams, telephone calls, telegrams. And at last:

"Maria, it's true: Grigori's alive. He's been seriously wounded. Now he's disabled. He wanted to hide himself from you."

She stood there, pale as death, squeezing her hands together with all her strength, and stared unblinkingly into Vorontsov's eyes, with enormous distended pupils.

She could understand nothing of what he was telling her. The sense of the words did not reach her. Grigori wanted to hide from her? What was the matter with him? Grigori was alive, but if that was right, what did all the rest matter?

"I don't understand," she said dully.

"He's alive, he's found, we'll have to get him here!"

"I shall go," she burst out.

He laid his hand on her shoulder.

"No, Maria, we'll go together. We'll go by air. Maybe you'll need help. It'll be better that way."

She wanted to object. Again Vorontsov, here too. Why? What was there so difficult about it? Grigori was alive, and she had to go for him—clear and simple enough, one would think.

But suddenly she felt her legs giving way under her, her strength draining away, everything began to swim before her, and there was a rushing noise in her ears. Yes, perhaps it would be better. Vorontsov would go with her, let it be that way...

"The plane goes tomorrow morning. I've already ordered the tickets. I'll come for you..." He glanced at his watch. "Yes, I'll come for you at half past nine. Now I must go and finish all I have to do before leaving."

She heard him as though through a mist. And even later, she could never remember how she lived through the hours till the next day.

She stood there, quite ready, her cap and gloves already on, and waited. There, the bell at last! Vorontsov! To the aerodrome! She dashed to open the door, knocking painfully against a box standing in the entrance. Opened the door—but no Vorontsov. Some boy who handed her an envelope.

"From Dr. Vorontsov."

"How? Where? But where is he himself?"

she cried, in a voice that caused the boy to step backward.

"The doctor's gone on the aeroplane."

"What do you mean, gone?"

The earth seemed to give way under her feet. What was all this? What an incredible business! Would there never be an end to these misunderstandings, these mistakes, this merciless torment?

"He's gone," repeated the boy, watching her carefully, ready to make a dash for it at her first movement. There was a look on her face that made him think her mad. She dropped her eyes to the letter in her hand, and he took the chance to dive hastily down the stairs. His feet in their worn shoes rattled like a machine-gun.

Again and again she read the letter, trying to take it in, repeating separated phrases in a whisper, as though that might help her to understand it.

"Not worth upsetting him"—was it her presence, then, that might upset him? Disabled—well, what of it, aren't there plenty of disabled men? What had that to do with Grigori, with Grigori and her? But perhaps it was not true? Perhaps Vorontsov had deceived her? Grigori was not alive at all, and he was afraid to tell her.

No, no, Grigori was alive and waiting for her. She herself and not just anybody ought to go for him. What right had Vorontsov to decide for her, to leave her at home like a little child? What right had he to be the first to see Grigori?

Maria ran out of the house. The telephone, the aerodrome number. There ought to be some other aeroplane going, there must be, and she would fly with it, overtake him, she would be there with Grigori...

"In three days. Yes, in three days. What organization?"

She dropped the receiver helplessly. Three days—by that time they would be on the way back. And she could not refer to any organization, either—she was not an official representative. She would have to give in.

Again she felt herself moving in a fog where all clearcut outlines disappeared, words became incomprehensible and time ceased to be. And out of this fog was born an inexplicable terror that crept upon her silently. That fear grew, clutched her heart; all the time she could feel that heart, a heavy small organ giving her agonizing pain.

Her mother was bustling feverishly about the apartment, hastily washing, polishing, putting everything in order in preparation for Grigori's arrival. She would fall on her knees before the ikon and pray aloud, her prayers of thankfulness broken and interspersed by sighs. But the very first vase Maria undertook to wash slipped from her fingers, and her mother angrily drove her out of the kitchen.

"Go along with you, go along to your own room! I'll manage better alone..."

She took over Raissa's duty as well as

her own—Raissa's sweetheart was home on leave from the front. Not to think, about anything. Bandages, iodine, medicine, temperature charts. She tried to turn herself into a machine, carrying out all her duties with irreproachable accuracy. She watched attentively as the drops of medicine trickled into the spoon, oval, greenish drops, and nothing else existed for her besides these drops. The mercury showed a wounded man's temperature—and nothing else existed at the moment except this slender line in the thermometer. Objects seemed to take on a new character, they ceased to be merely objects, long familiar, uninteresting things. She began to discover a host of details that had never existed for her previously. They became imbued with life, with their own various peculiarities. She discovered a thread weaving a complicated pattern through the bandage; the edge of the glass was of another colour; the metal spoons were criss-crossed with a network of tiny patterns. The smooth surface of the quilt disappeared, it grew a forest of silvery threads, trembling fearfully at every movement of the body beneath. Objects seemed to come to life, to move, as though in a fairy tale. A new world opened, a mysterious world hitherto unknown. Stubbornly, with concentrated attention Maria watched and noted more and more new details. And that was an excellent means to prevent herself from letting her thoughts dwell upon the one thing, the most important thing. Only from time to time a hot wind seemed to seize her.

Operations, bandages, the professor's rounds, night duty and again the rounds of the beds, and again operations...

"You ought to take some rest," one of the nurses told her. But Maria waved her away with a desperate gesture. No, no, not for anything on earth! If necessary, she would take over a third person's duty, only not rest!

It was only in the evening that she dozed a little, when having her tea, which was brought to her on the little table in the nurses' room. Then sleep would suddenly seize upon her, draw her head down to the corner of that table and sweep her into unconsciousness.

And it was in that very place that nurse Tatyana came and put her hand on Maria's shoulder.

"Maria, they've brought in your husband."

The elderly woman's plain, wrinkled face was irradiated with a joyful smile. Maria was awake in a second. Vorontsov was standing in the doorway, but on his face there was no smile.

"Come, he's waiting," he said, and Maria followed him obediently, her head ringing. Her heart was beating as though it would burst. She stumbled on the stairs, and Vorontsov grasped her elbow to steady her.

"He's feeling well. The journey did not tire him too much."

Maria was walking swiftly, almost run-

ning. He checked her. She glanced at him in surprise.

"Maria, I must warn you..."

An icy stream seemed to run through her. Her fingers and toes were numb. What new horror was about to burst upon her? Was it still a mistake, and Grisha not alive after all?

But Tatyana had told her plainly—"they've brought in your husband." And then suddenly, like a lightning flash—why "brought," why not "he's come?" Why, what nonsense, he'd been in hospital, been wounded, she knew already that he was disabled...

It was only now that the full meaning of that word reached her understanding. But still it conveyed nothing—just a strange, meaningless word.

"Warn me?"

"Yes, warn you. Grigori has been very seriously wounded. He is still far from recovered. You'll have to be very careful with him. You understand?"

No, she understood nothing. Vorontsov was pale, and avoided looking at her.

"Why?"

"Oh, you ask as though you were a child!" he said helplessly.

She stood there on the stairs, without understanding why he had stopped her.

"He... Maria, he's very badly mutilated..."

Again that icy stream. From somewhere in her head, running through her whole body right down to her very toes.

"You must keep a grip on yourself, Maria... You know, so that in the first moment..."

The icy stream had not gone. It gripped her whole body, chilled the skin of her cheeks, drew her lips painfully tight.

"He's... over-sensitive, he's afraid... So you..."

She nodded silently. Vorontsov gripped her hand with a friendly pressure. She did not reply to the hand-clasp. She went along the corridor at her usual pace, feeling the chill stiffening her, feeling that she was no longer a living person, but a statue of ice. It was no longer fear, it was something more terrible than fear itself, something which gripped her heart with iron hands. If Vorontsov... if even Vorontsov...

The door. The doctor pressed her hand again and turned the handle, standing aside to allow her to precede him.

Good that there was no blood in her veins, but only ice. Good that her whole body was numb, stiffened. Somebody was sitting there in the armchair. In the first moment she wanted to retreat—this was some mistake. What a good thing that her numb body refused to react to her thought! Maria went up to the armchair. The bandages had been taken from the head. Evidently he had wanted it that way, had demanded that they be removed, so that she should see everything at once. A terrible blue and scarlet burn. The thick weals of scars. An eye beaten back into the head, with nothing human about it. Her eyes travelled further. The empty shirt sleeve,

the thick roll of bandages, the immovable leg in its plaster of Paris. That was Grigori. With a tremendous effort of will she mastered herself. Approached, knelt down before the armchair, knowing that that was what she must do. Beside her another Maria was standing—one who observed everything and told her what she had to do.

Vorontsov tiptoed out, closing the door carefully behind him.

"Mariika..."

Obediently the orders of that other Maria, she mastered herself and raised her eyes to the disfigured face. Everything went dark before her, she could see nothing. But that other one repeated sternly and ruthlessly that this was what she must do.

"I didn't want to come back to you. I didn't want you to see," she heard a hoarse, cracked whisper. Now she must reply. She sought a suitable answer. But she could find nothing. Desperately she seized upon the first word that came to her mind:

"I know..."

"Don't be angry, darling... Victor told me, and I understood that I was wrong..."

Ah, yes, Vorontsov... It seemed a little easier. Evidently Vorontsov had already told him everything necessary. What more, what more was needed from her?

The touch of his hand on her hair. She could not refrain from thinking—continually, with horror, that it was his *only* hand. She moved—after all, she could not support herself with her elbows on his knees as she used to do in the old days. She must look into his face again, so that he should not notice that she was afraid to do so.

Maria started.

"My dear..."

She closed her eyes. That might be from joy, from the intoxication of happiness. He could never guess that she was looking into a terrible, cold void in her heart, where there was nothing but fear... What horrible disfigurements, what wounds she had had to see, bandage and treat in this hospital! But never, never—only now, for the first time...

With difficulty she overcame her numbness and without looking at it, stroked his arm with a cold, lifeless hand.

"What happiness, to be together with you again!..."

She nodded. He had seen nothing, noticed nothing. If only he asked no questions, if only she need not talk, tell him about anything... Yes, yes, Vorontsov... What had Vorontsov told him?

The door opened.

"Well, Maria Pavlovna, we'll have to part you from your husband for a moment," said the doctor cheerily. "You rest a little, and we'll look after the patient."

"I..." Maria demurred weakly, but the doctor waved her away with a gesture.

"No question of it. Go and rest, and not another word more about it. Later on we'll invite you back again."

With an effort Maria smiled at the cripple in the armchair and went out. In the nurses'

room she sank heavily into a chair and rested her chin on her folded hands.

So that was Grigori. That was how their youth and happiness had ended.

"Maria..."

Vorontsov stroked her hand lying on the table. She looked at him inimically.

"Don't grieve... It's just for the first moment... We'll treat him... A lot can be done..."

She jerked out an angry, dry laugh.

"A lot can be done... And what can you do then, oh great doctor?"

"An artificial limb... Plastic surgery..."

"I know, I know..."

What could Vorontsov know of the terrible sense of loss in her heart, of the black void gaping in her soul? A dry wind rushing and roaring, carrying fine sand from place to place. And it seemed that in her heart there was nothing but that sand and the evil, choking wind...

"You need to rest, Maria. Too many impressions all at once. It'll be easier later on... Of course, I understand..."

No, he understood nothing. What impressions? The worst of all was that there was no impression at all. It seemed to Maria as though she had had a premonition, had known for a long time that this was how it would be. Her heart would become cold, empty and dry, and would never be able to feel or to suffer again. She felt anger rising in her against that man sitting opposite, looking at her sympathetically. How dare he sympathize with her? She asked nobody's pity. She wanted to be alone with her misery.

"Well, why are you looking at me like that, oh wise doctor? Pitying me, eh? Nothing to pity me about, no need to put on that sad look! As things are, they will be, and that's all there is to it!"

"As they are, Maria?"

His head dropped, he ceased to look at her. Mechanically he began smoothing the creases on the tablecloth.

"But I don't know how they are," he said softly.

"You don't know? Plain and simple enough. I shall work at the hospital and look after him for the whole of my life,—you hear me, for the whole of my life! Live together with his leg and his hacked-off arm and his disfigured face. You hear me? How else could it be?"

"Don't be angry, Maria. That's how it should be. Only... Only not that way, Maria," he ended, avoiding her eyes.

"What do you mean, not that way?"

"You should say it in a different tone."

"Ah, that's it? Soulfully, with tears in my eyes and my hand on my heart?"

"Not necessarily. You know well enough what I'm talking about. You mustn't, Maria, that's not the way."

She turned her burning eyes upon him.

"Yes? Do you really mean to say so? And all that has happened to my life, to my happiness—that's natural, that's quite in order, is it? That doesn't worry you or revolt you? It's only I, always I that must

behave in just the right way, the exemplary fashion, self-controlled, sensible calm? Yes?"

"You're not the only one, Maria." There was a stern note in his voice. "You are just one out of thousands and thousands."

"I've heard your moralizing before. And so if I'm not the only one, that should make it easier for me, should it?" she added mockingly.

"Yes, that should make it easier for you. You ought to understand. Though for that matter, what's the use of our going over it all now? Better, I think, some other time. Now you ought to rest. Calm down a little. All that you've just been saying is not like you at all... Not your way..."

"No, that's just what I am like."

"No, quite different."

"You know better, eh?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, now we know. You know what you know, and I'll know what I know."

There was a knock at the door.

"Maria Pavlovna, the professor's asking for you. Your husband's bandages are to be changed."

She nodded to Vorontsov and went. Husband... What a strange word, what did it mean? Previously it had meant Grigori. But now?

"Ah, there's Maria Pavlovna. We didn't want to start without you. Naturally, you have to assist in bandaging your own husband, eh?" the professor laughed benevolently.

Mechanically she handed bandages, tampons, spirit. Her hands never trembled, she felt no agitation. Everything was just as it always was. The old professor, of course, thought that it was the greatest happiness for her—to help him bandage Grigori. He had not wanted to begin without her.

In this theatre she had assisted hundreds and hundreds of times. Hundreds of times she had handed bandages, instruments. This piece of flesh lying on the operating table—this was Grigori. Stupid and ridiculous—that this should be Grigori. Suppose the professor could suddenly know what she was thinking and feeling at this moment? Probably he would order her to leave the theatre and never enter it again. Several times he raised his eyes from his work and cast a kindly, understanding look at her. Yes, honoured professor, it all seems to you so simple and easy. The husband has been found, the husband of whose death she had been notified owing to some mistake, and the wife was wild with joy. What else could the professor conceive? It ought to make her happy to be rolling bandages for her own husband. He had waited for her, had not wanted to begin without her—such kindness, such consideration!

That blood in the white bowl—that was Grigori's blood. The wet, sticky strands of hair—Grigori's hair. That red mask gradually disappearing beneath the bandage—that was Grigori's face.

"And that's how it will be, as long as

life is," she thought as she rolled a bandage carefully and evenly. Grigori would come home again, to that same home which they had made together, which they had arranged and beautified. He would be in that room, where every piece of furniture, every ornament would remind them of some moment of their life together. But there was no more Grigori and no more Maria. There were new, strange, terrible people. She herself was no less terrible than Grigori, although nobody had remarked it yet. But in the end that would be noticed too. It was impossible that that emptiness, cold and gloom reigning in her heart should not reflect itself in her face, lay its mark upon her.

"Finished, you can take your husband," joked the professor, and automatically, skilfully, as she had done it hundreds of times before, Maria pushed the wheeled stretcher carrying Grigori to the door.

Black spots of weariness whirled before her eyes. Her legs were aching, her arms were aching, and her heart was filled with a grinding, hopeless dreariness. Always the same thing, always the same thing. A wounded man screaming in number six, on the second floor the major was dying, a young soldier in number ten was being discharged.

Now, for the first time she felt overcome by a deadly weariness. She had to make the greatest effort to master herself and force herself to do what was required of her. Previously, she had drawn strength and joy from Grigori's smile, his voice, the look of his eyes. Grisha had been with her day and night, he had accompanied her to the wounded men's beds, whispered in her ear the words that she must say to them, helped her to lift those helpless men's bodies, supported her arms when they weakened, with her had gone down the hospital corridor; whatever she had done was done together with him and for him. It had been his wounds that she had bandaged when tending hundreds of others, it was to his thirsty lips that she had brought water, at him that she had smiled. Every wounded man had been Grigori.

And now Grisha was lying there quite close to her, she could go in any moment and see him, any moment she could hear his voice, not in her dreams or in her memories, but real and waking. But this did not give her the strength, joy or happiness she had had before.

"After all, I'm working, working as I always did," Maria soothed herself, but at the time she knew very well that it was not at all the same as before. The water which she gave to the wounded was just water, and not the enchanted drink which brought new life to them. The hand laid upon a feverish forehead was merely gauging the temperature, its touch gave no healing sleep. The smile which she called up with an effort no longer brought faith and hope into the ward. And she herself

felt that her work no longer filled her with strength as it had formerly, but rather drained all her forces, caused her blinding headaches, pains in her arms, her legs, and a feeling of indifference and apathy. Faces came to lose their individual features, became one face of a wounded man, the face of a stranger, telling her nothing. The stories of human lives, variegated, filled with hundreds of lights and shadows, had become all one and the same distant uninteresting life. No, now the professor could no longer say: "It is not I, it is you, Maria Pavlovna, who are healing the wounded." Now she merely carried out her duties like some machine, accurate, but dead and indifferent. And it seemed this was not sufficient. Previously she had given of her own joy to the wounded, her own strength, her youth and courage. Now she gave only water and bandages, powders and drops.

"How do you feel?"

The wounded man turned on Maria a face still half-covered with a white cocoon of bandages.

"Better, well. Maybe you could take off another rag?"

"They'll come off, they'll come off in due course. Wait a bit yet."

"You aren't ill, are you, nurse?"

She started.

"No. Why?"

"I don't know, I just wondered."

Maria shook her head.

"Have you a moment to spare?"

"Yes, just a few moments."

She wanted to smile at him, but somehow it was no good. Her lips twisted painfully. The dark eye looked at her attentively from under the white bandage. She felt unsure of herself, just as though this young fellow could see right through her, and knew what was in her heart.

"Could you read me a letter?"

"A letter? Have you had another one?"

"No," he mumbled in some confusion.

"The same one."

"But you know it by heart already."

"That doesn't matter. To know it by heart's one thing, but to hear it is quite different. But maybe you don't want to read it, nurse?"

"No, no, of course I do. I'll read it with pleasure. Give it to me."

It was already hard to decipher the words. They had been read hundreds of times; they had become rubbed and smeared, and the paper was crumpled, darkened with sweating hands. She also knew the letter almost by heart.

"My dear Vassya..."

He raised himself on the pillow, supporting himself with his hand, in order to hear better. He awaited the familiar words, a smile parting his bloodless lips.

"Love from myself and Mummie, sister Frossya, Auntie and all the neighbours. Why don't you write me where you are wounded..."

"I'm very glad," the wounded man interrupted her.

"Yes, yes, excuse me, please. I left it out. I'm very glad that I know where you are, your address. Why don't you write me where you are wounded?"

She felt silent for a moment. She could remember the next phrase, and her heart contracted. He looked at her in surprise.

"Just a moment, just a moment, it's very rubbed here..."

"I want to tell you..." he prompted her.

"Yes, yes, of course. I want to tell you that I'd come to you all the same, so write me where you are wounded, and even if you're disabled for always, don't you begin thinking things because I'm just the same as I always was..."

Her voice died away. Vassya held out his hand.

"Give it back to me."

"You don't want me to read it?"

It was only now that she heard in dismay her own dull, expressionless voice.

"No, I don't. Give it to me."

There was a note of impatience in his voice. He took the tattered sheet from her and carefully laid it under his pillow, looking at Maria with hostility.

"Thanks, nurse, I don't need anything more."

"Very well, as you like."

"Yes, that's right."

He turned to the wall as though to show that he did not wish to talk any more.

"Do you want to sleep?"

"Yes. I'll sleep for a little."

She straightened his quilt and went out softly. In the corridor she stopped by the window. What was this? Why? How many times she had read him that letter which for him held all joy and happiness; renewed his faith in life, in people, in the future. What was it that had changed? She had no longer been able to read the letter, she had robbed the words of all the radiance and colour which they themselves contained and which she had formerly given them. What right had she to take all faith and hope away from this young fellow whom she herself had brought back to life?

"What has happened to you? What have you become?" she asked herself, pressing her heated brow to the glass. "Maria, who are you now?"

Slowly she went downstairs. The same well-known corridor. How many voices it had had for her, when she had hurried along it to the ward, to the operating theatre, when she had run here and there, ready to answer any call, considerate, attentive, filled with an inner joy, and a love that expressed itself in deeds for all those lying in the wards.

But now the corridor was silent, it was just an ordinary, white, cold corridor with a narrow red strip of carpet running along it. The closed doors of the wards were silent. The walls gave off a cold breath, those same walls which not so long ago

had been to her like the walls of her home.

"It is you who have become a different person now, you who have changed," she told herself, as she went down the stairs. How many people had gone down those stairs whom she had saved, preserved, torn from the clutches of death! They had left here, treasuring the memory of her name. And now even Vassya turned from her. And not because she had read the letter badly—with a kind of sixth sense he had felt the change in her. Because she was betraying him too.

But perhaps it was just that she herself had been deceived, terribly deceived by life? By all that she had believed in, all that she had thought most important in life, the only real thing?

But if that were so, then why this uneasiness, this feeling of guilt, this shame which would not let her hold her head high when she approached the wounded men's beds, would not let her meet their expectant eyes, filled with questions which formerly she had always been able to answer?

"What have you become, Maria?" she asked her own heart, and felt that everything had turned to dust and ashes in her hands.

Black days had also come for Dr. Vorontsov. It began unexpectedly, crept upon him stealthily, and mastered him before he was aware of it. This dark, evil power grew, and he was powerless against it.

Maria was walking along the corridor. There were dark circles beneath her eyes. A pale, thin face. This was Maria, his beloved, the only woman in the world. Hands hanging limply, shoulders drooping wearily. Oh, to pick her up in his arms, to take her away, far, far away, to some sunny glade, into the mountains, to the sound of swift-flowing streams! To protect her from the sun with green branches, to make her look into the deep blue vault and think of nothing, of nothing...

Maria handed instruments, quiet, deft, swift as always. There was a bitter line around her mouth which had not been there previously. The eyes were dead.

How much he had to overcome in himself, how much he had suffered, watching their love, their open, overflowing, unrestrained gaiety which you could not help noticing, their boundless devotion to one another...

And now, on that third floor, a cripple was sitting, the mutilated stump of a man, and that was Maria's husband. And now there was no longer the former love between them. Yes, he had told her so himself, grimly and harshly. Perhaps just because he loved her. He wanted to be hard with her. The whole of his life he had been a decent, honourable man. He had never played a dirty trick on anybody, and he had principles which he had consistently lived up to, whatever the circumstances.

But now a worm was gnawing at his heart. Why, for what good cause, must this delightful youthfulness be lost? Its brilliance be dimmed, the eyes lose their lustre, even the gold of the hair become tarnished. The joy and beauty of life was fading, growing dulled. Every day brought hard lines onto the smooth young face, with every day the rosy tint faded from her lips, which were gradually paling to a papery whiteness.

What had happened, then? Maria had been destroyed, she was lost, had been utterly annihilated—and upstairs sat Grigori, staring at one point on the white wall. It was impossible to deceive him—neither Maria's smile nor her soft words could lead him astray. After all, he knew his wife, and once upon a time she had loved him, how she had loved him!... He could not but feel, could not fail to understand, what was happening.

Then why should all three of them torment themselves? Evil thoughts stole up and whispered in his ear. Better that Grigori alone should be unhappy. Everything was ended for him in any case—after all Maria did not love him. But she might still love again—she was young, there was so much life and vitality in her. She might love him, Vorontsov. He would take care of her, warm her numbed heart, teach her once more to laugh, to love life. He was the person closest to her now, when Grigori was gloomily watching one point on the wall. Whom else could she love? Only him. And they would be happy.

"What is more important," whispered the base thought, "the happiness of two young and healthy people or duty to a cripple? If she still loved him—but evidently there is no love and cannot be. And even if she did... better for one to go down than for all three..."

He struggled against these thoughts, cursed them in his heart. But they continued to return, again and again.

"You're not looking too well these days," the professor told him, and Vorontsov reddened like a boy. He felt as though he had been caught in some crime, that the professor's keen eyes had penetrated the secret which he guarded like the apple of his eye.

"I'm rather tired," he replied calmly, bending over the instruments, so that the professor should not see the expression in his eyes.

He feared every meeting with Maria, feared to talk to Grigori. But the latter never touched on any painful subject. He was simply a patient, nothing more. For hours he would stare at one spot, or exercise his left hand incessantly, systematically, but somehow mechanically—just as though it were not the thing that really mattered. What was he thinking, feeling? That he told nobody. A strained, artificial tone was maintained between him and Vorontsov, just as though questions of temperature and the healing of burns were the only ones worthy of attention.

But all this outer calm concealed some-

thing very different. Vorontsov sometimes caught the look the patient gave him when he thought that the doctor was not watching him. And it was a look of burning hatred—naked, open, unrestrained hatred. And Vorontsov knew its origin, its cause. Grigori could not forgive him for his words in the hospital, words which had induced him to change his mind and return. It was Vorontsov who was to blame for what was happening now, and Captain Chernov thought with longing of his sufferings at the time when he had condemned himself to eternal separation. Had it not been for Vorontsov... There was hatred in his eyes, and Vorontsov saw and understood it.

But now, it seemed, he had not the strength for any new resolution. Evidently Grigori had decided to wait passively for what might come. He never looked at Maria—it was very plain to see that he tried to avoid her eyes.

"We are lying, we are lying!" Vorontsov repeated to himself stubbornly and bitterly. Would it not be better to cut through this knot, to take her away, begin a new life, forget the existence of the disabled man Chernov? Who had the right to demand that a young, beautiful, healthy woman should be tied for ever to a cripple?

Yes, that was just what Grigori had told him. Because he had not wanted to return home, he had wanted to be dead for Maria. And there he himself had gone for Grigori, had convinced him, brought him back...

"After all," he told himself, "you could have lied, could have said that the telegram was a mistake. You could have strengthened Grigori in his decision, helped to get him transferred to another hospital, where nobody would have known him. And Maria would have been free. And there would have been none of this terrible tormenting business, in which we are all entangled and perishing, like flies in a spinner's web"

"Vassya's girl has come," said Rajssa.

They all called him Vassya at the hospital, that obstinate fellow who at first had filled the whole place with his desperation, upset everybody, broken all rules, forced them to give him a separate room and tend him like a child, and then calmed down and reconciled himself to his fate. That had been Maria's work, and once upon a time—how terribly long ago it seemed, although actually little time had passed since that day—she had been proud of it as if she had borne a son of her own.

But now everything had changed, there was nothing to be proud of. The "absolute truth" had turned out to be a lie. She had deceived a trusting fellow, who had believed her. Had torn him forcibly from the gloom in which he had been plunged, poured the will to existence into his heart. What right had she had to do it?

At that time she had believed that she possessed the right. But now that clear

flame illuminating the whole of life had gone out. No, they understood nothing, those people who thought that her smile had faded, her voice lost its ring, because Grisha... That she was sharing the unhappiness of one she loved... All that was a lie. Her faith was gone, that faith which had given her strength and joy. And in her heart there was nothing but a gaping black void.

And now Vassya's girl had come. He was awaiting her as Maria had told him he should, with gladness and faith. The girl had come from a distant village, and it was only with difficulty that she had managed to get a ticket for the journey to go and fetch her boy home. Now she would see, would learn that the ruthless hand of war had changed, mutilated the one she loved. He was no longer the same, he did not even remind her of the Vassya whom she used to meet in some cherry orchard. He had become another man, different, a stranger.

"Shall I take her upstairs, or shall she wait here?"

"Take her up. Let her help him up there, it she wants to."

Maria's strange tone as she said these words surprised Raissa.

"What do you mean—if she wants to?"

Maria caught herself up with a dry, unpleasant laugh.

"Why you silly! After all, it's your job to help a wounded man to pack his things!"

"Well, yes, of course," said Raissa, her wonder subsiding, and left the room.

Maria went to the door, then retreated again. Some irresistible force was drawing her upstairs, to see what was going on there. Quietly she opened the door, and began tiptoeing up the stairs. Holding her breath, she neared the room. Was that a cry she heard? No, it was just her imagination.

And suddenly she was brought up sharp by an inexplicable sound, unexpected, impossible. There, on the other side of the door, they were laughing. Not the hysterical laughter of despair, but ordinary, normal, happy laughter.

She opened the door. Vassya was sitting on a chair, fully clothed. The empty sleeve of his tunic hung down pitifully. A lock of hair was pulled rakishly over his missing eye.

The country lass was kneeling before the chair and trying to pin up the empty trouser leg. And both of them were laughing—both, Vassya watching her efforts, and the kneeling girl with her kerchief on her head. Raissa was standing beside them, gathering up his things.

The girl rose from her knees, and Maria saw light hair escaping from beneath her kerchief, blue eyes and a round, laughing, happy face.

Maria stopped short as though she had received a blow in the chest. Vassya raised his black eye to her and winked.

"Here, Olya, here's the nurse I wrote you about, nurse Maria."

The girl extended her hand. Maria felt the pressure of hard, seamed fingers. As though under a spell, understanding nothing, she looked into those merry blue eyes.

"Thank you," said the girl briefly and simply, and turned back to Vassya. It was clear that nothing else mattered to her, that everything else was unimportant to her in comparison with the fact that she was taking her Vassya home. She carefully fastened his collar, and brushed an invisible speck of dust off his sleeve. She took up the crutches standing by the wall and ran a businesslike eye over them.

"Are they strong?"

"Don't worry, they'll bear me, I'm not so heavy now, I'm an arm and a leg the less," laughed Vassya merrily. And the girl took it as a joke. The shining white teeth flashed from between her lips.

"Later on he'll get artificial limbs, there'll be nothing noticeable," Raissa assured her enthusiastically.

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"But why? They say that these artificial limbs are heavy. There's a cripple in our village from the last war, he's got one too, but he says it's difficult, crutches are better. And as for its being noticeable, is there anything to be ashamed of? What nonsense! Let everybody see that he's fought! Isn't that right, Vassya?"

Raissa had to put her word in again.

"Those were old artificial limbs. It's quite another matter now."

"Well, if that's the case," the girl agreed indifferently. "Though for that matter, the crutches are all right, aren't they? You'll walk about the garden, along the road, get used to them, learn to skip about with them. Here, of course, it's difficult," she added, with a glance at the smooth parquet flooring.

"I'll get used to it all right," he agreed.

"Well, shall we go, eh?"

She was in a hurry, she wanted so much to get her Vassya out of the hospital walls, to take him under her own wing.

"There's a car going to the station, it'll take you along," said Maria curtly.

"That's splendid, because with all these changes I'd be sure and certain to lose my way," said Olya gladly.

Raissa helped Vassya to rise. Olya swiftly gave him the crutches. He supported himself on them, looking unexpectedly tall and slender.

"Oh, how thin he's got!" said the girl amazed. "Haven't they given you enough to eat here, or what?" she asked, just as though the nurses were not there in the room. She was already far away, and he no longer belonged to the hospital, he belonged only to her.

"You're a fine one! All these months I've been lying here in the hospital—you think that's nothing, eh?"

"Well, never mind, I'll feed you up like a turkey-cock," Olya told him, picking up the bundles from the floor.

Vassya held out his hand to Raissa. Then

he moved awkwardly forward several steps with his crutches and halted in front of Maria.

"If I write to you, nurse, will you answer me?"

His tone provoked Maria. He had already completely forgotten all that he had suffered here in the hospital, forgotten those nights of stress and terror, the fits of frantic despair which she had to calm, all those months when they had fetched her to him because there was nobody else who could deal with him.

"Of course, I shall," she replied curtly.

The young fellow fussed about with his crutches. She could not understand what was the matter with him. And suddenly he flung his only arm round her and kissed her on the cheek. A strand of dark hair touched her eye. Her throat tightened, and she stroked his head as she had done so often before, when he had been lying, wounded and sick, like a wrapped-up white doll.

"Good luck, Vassya!"

Maria returned to the nurses' room. Her cheeks were flaming. She stood by the window and pressed her face to the glass. How could it be? Why? Was she really so much worse than that country girl? Why had she been able to find merry laughter and ordinary calm words for the meeting, without either despair or fear? In that cripple she had recognized her Vassya with infallible certainty, known and accepted him. She had not philosophized through the nights, struggled with herself, but simply come, and accepted him just exactly as she had written. Her letter had been honest down to the last syllable. She found no need to conceal his mutilations, she wanted everybody to see that her Vassya had fought.

Maria groaned, bit her lips.

"The professor says you can come home, Grigori," said Maria avoiding her husband's eye as usual.

"Home..." he mumbled slowly.

"No reason to stay here any more," she said, fussing round with forced liveliness. "Enough of hospital for you!"

He watched her from under his brows, saying not a word. She gathered up some things, trying to appear very busy. If only he did not notice, if only he did not notice!..

Because the worst lay ahead, the most terrible of all was still awaiting them. Home. There she would not be able to make the excuse of being busy, would not be able to treat him as a patient. There it would be home, husband, normal life, the watchful eye of her mother bent disapprovingly upon her. There it would be a hundred times harder than it had been up to now.

An icy fear gripped her. She could not tell the professor: "No, I don't want to" when he said that the patient's condition permitted him to be treated at home; she could not say: "I beg of you, I implore you to keep him here as long as possible,

to put off as long as possible that terrible moment when we shall be left face to face at home, in our room, where we have spent two happy years of love."

She had to overcome that fear, to smile, and again to deceive that simple old man who was so glad that Grigori's health had improved.

Of course, her mother had not been able to keep it to herself, and had told all the neighbours. Or perhaps they themselves had guessed, been waiting for it? Faces flashed in the windows, and doors opened on the stairs. A triumphal procession!

The first floor, the second, like the road to Calvary. And at last the door which they could close behind them, to shut out curious or sympathetic human eyes.

The room.

Grigori's face paled with emotion. For this was their room, the room of their happiness. He touched the writing table with his hand, moved Maria's photograph standing upon it. Took up his own photograph in its silver frame, the photograph of that Grigori who no longer existed. "I should have hidden it," thought Maria. "But it's too late now."

Her mother fussed about, sobbing, but these were tears of joy. She came up to Grigori and tenderly, carefully stroked his shoulder. For her it was the same Grigori, and as usual, she had no time for what was happening with her daughter.

The orderlies said good-bye and left, followed by Vorontsov, who of course had found it necessary to be present at all this. Maria tried to detain him. But Vorontsov, as usual, understood nothing. Desperately Maria clung to her mother, putting all kinds of senseless questions to her, without listening to the answers. She was trembling all over inside herself.

Now they had finished tea. The hands of the clock seemed to be racing, the old woman kissed Grigori and said good night to him. Maria jumped up in fright. Unnecessarily she took the cloth of the table and carefully folded it. What next, what next?

Grigori spoke quietly:

"Will you take the divan from the other room for yourself, Maria?"

Maria did not look at him. Under her mother's disapproving gaze she moved the divan into the room where there was not even a place for it, where it stood up in the middle like an uninvited guest.

"I'm tired," said Grigori. "Excuse me but I'll go to bed at once."

Grigori went to bed, said "Good night" quietly, and turned to the wall.

And Maria went to bed alone. But sleep would not come to her. Tormenting shame filled her heart. What was it that she feared? She felt so small and pitiful. In that moment it was not he who was the cripple—it was her heart that was mutilated, soiled and unworthy.

It was muddy on the square, and large raindrops were falling from the naked

grey twigs. Maria walked along, looking at the broad puddles. She came out onto the river bank. The ice had not yet melted, but it could hardly be distinguished from the mud; on the square, where the feet of passers-by had trodden it into narrow paths leading in all directions, it was covered with soot and dry leaves.

Vorontsov coughed. She turned to him. He looked at her with an uncertain confused gaze. He swallowed, she could see his throat moving, and the helpless, stupid-looking movement of his small moustache. It was not easy for him to begin to tell her why he had asked her to meet him.

She could have helped him, but she did not want to do so.

She pulled the collar of her coat tighter round her throat. A cold breath came from the frozen river. She looked ahead at the dirty ice, the frozen crust, the hopeless grey.

"I can't look on all this... Maria. You know I love you. I loved you before ever you married Grigori."

"At the nursing course?" she said in a kind of business-like surprise, but indifferently, as though the whole thing did not concern herself.

"Yes, at the course... You did not notice it, or did not want to notice it..."

"I didn't know," she said calmly. "And even if I had known..."

"Yes, yes, you mean that wouldn't have changed anything," he interrupted her with an irritation unusual in him. "You needn't tell me that, I know it very well myself... But you see... It has gone on ever since that time. You married Grisha—well, that was that. I resigned myself to my fate, you saw that I never tried to gain your affection, never tried to be a rival to Grigori... I behaved as a friend, isn't that true, Maria?"

"Yes," she agreed, looking at the grey houses rising beyond the river. Windows, windows without end. And behind every window somebody's life, each window hiding a human life, which looked out through the dull glass onto the frozen river on this grey, foggy day.

"And then..." Vorontsov's voice trembled. "Then I thought... It seemed to me that you had come to need me. You were never bored or sad with me, or so I felt... We had so many common interests, so much to do together... I thought everything might change and turn out differently from when I first knew you..."

She nodded, without listening to him. It was like a dream, like being in some soft, thick fog. All words were unreal, all events. Yes, for that matter she had been living in a dream for a long time, a heavy, choking, grey dream...

"And now I look at it all... And I can't stand it any longer. You are tormenting yourself, you're going to pieces before my eyes, you've become another person..."

That meant, he knew it too, he too had seen that she had become somebody else,

that the former Maria was no longer there...

"I understand, you could sacrifice yourself if you loved... Although even in such cases self-sacrifice doesn't always bring the best results—for both parties... But here—after all, I've got eyes in my head, Maria, I can see that you don't love him any more, you can't love him..."

She was silent.

"Yes, yes, you can't deny it, you don't love him any more."

Why was he saying it? After all, she had not denied it. She felt as though the sound of his words was coming to her from somewhere far, far away, from beyond that thick, grey fog, that they were not really directed to her, but flowed past her, like water flowing under ice, trickling away, murmuring along the slimy bottom.

"And it's not only that you don't love him. Don't be angry at what I'm going to say, but it's clear that you feel a repulsion for him, a fear. I can see it, I understand. And there's no sense in it all... For after all, Grigori can't help feeling it and understanding it. What are you giving him? Care? But any nurse can give him that without being his wife, and without being nauseated in addition."

Yes, that was true... For the first time she realized that Vorontsov really was right. He had certainly already felt it, noticed it. How strange,—it had never occurred to her that she could not conceal it from Grigori...

"You are unhappy yourself, and you're not making him happy. Do you think it's easy to know you nauseate somebody who used to love you? Maria, you haven't the right to do it, you haven't the right to spoil your own life... What is it for? You will both go to pieces... Now I realize that he was right when he did not want to return, although at the time it seemed to me senseless..."

She stood silent and motionless.

"You have no right to put an end to your own life. You are young, full of vitality, capable. Life still holds many experiences for you, much that you can do. You will make nothing of yourself if you tie yourself to this man..."

Yes, once upon a time she had been young. It had seemed to her, then, that there was no end or limit to that youth, that she could cover the whole world with it. But now it had gone, deserted her. Like a coloured balloon when all the air has left it. It floats in the air, that bright-coloured sphere: Children's feet patter under it, children's hands clap gaily. Adults smilingly watch the balloon soaring up, a rainbow dream, a soap bubble reflecting the sun. But the envelope bursts, and on the earth there lies a crumpled dirty rag, a fragment which has lost its brilliance and colour, a piece of rubbish nobody needs. And that was what her youth had been, her vitality—like a bright-coloured balloon which lives only for a few hours...

"Do you hear me, Maria?"

She nodded. Of course, she heard his voice, obstinately, incessantly, penetrating the curtain of grey fog.

"You must live like a normal, healthy person, it is your duty. I love you. You hear me, Maria? I love you..."

"But I don't love you, Victor," she said slowly, still studying the prints of somebody's feet on the dirty ice.

"I know that, Maria... I don't expect it from you at once... Come away with me, we'll go away from here. I can get a transfer to some other place... We'll go a long, long way away, you'll see the mountains, you'll breathe other air... The fruit-trees will soon be blossoming there... You will see gardens, roses... You'll forget it all, gradually you'll come to forget... And then... I'm not repulsive to you... I think you've become a little fond of me in all this time... You know me, you know the sort of man I am. I love you, Maria, and I shall try to see that you are happy with me, as happy as you can possibly be. I shall try..."

"And Grigori?" she asked softly.

"I understand you, Maria. But you know yourself, you can feel yourself... It doesn't make it a scrap easier for him to have you with him. You won't be injuring him... After all he can see, he can understand what is happening to you! And remember, he himself wanted... Just think, if it had not been for that Sonya, everything would have been quite different..."

Yes, of course, that was clear, everything would have been quite different. And suddenly in some way a rent came in the grey fog, a tiny fissure through which she could see—Grigori dead. He had died somewhere far away. She would never see him again. The journey to Beryozovka... The lonely hours... There was no Grigori, there would never be any more Grigori...

At that thought Maria felt a sudden, sharp pang of fear. All the following days had melted, disappeared—the telegram, the notice, Grigori's arrival. She swayed.

"What is the matter with you, Maria?" he asked in alarm.

"Nothing, nothing..."

But they had brought Grigori, Grigori was at home now, and she was standing with Vorontsov beside the river. All that was past and gone.

"Maria, answer me, tell me what you are thinking? Why don't you say anything? We'll go away together, begin a new life. Shall we?"

She nodded mechanically, staring fixedly at one spot—footmarks on the ice. She would have to pack a suitcase... The flowers would be out... Yes, in Georgia it was warm already... With Vorontsov, of course, with Vorontsov...

"You'd have had to decide sooner or later, Maria, so why put it off, postpone it? We are all three miserable, but this way..."

She mechanically nodded her assent. The

grey fog gathered, rolled, grew to a grey wall, the words fell into it as though into a pile of down, immediately losing their sound and colour.

Vorontsov looked round. A fine rain was falling, and nobody was near them. He raised Maria's hand to his lips and kissed it.

A tall, slender woman stopped Maria in the corridor.

"How can I find the director's office?"

"I'll take you there," said Maria, and led the way. The unknown woman's heels tapped rhythmically on the parquet. She drew up level with Maria. The pale profile was etched in a fine line against the drooping brim of a black hat. A faint perfume was wafted from her clothes.

"In here, please."

Maria knocked and opened the door for her.

"Ah, I'm glad you've come, Maria Pavlovna," said the director, and Maria stayed in the room.

The tall woman gave the director a white, slender hand.

"I have come... I'm looking for my husband... He should be here, in this hospital..." she said in a broken, barely audible voice.

The director looked at her absent-mindedly. Evidently he was thinking about something else.

"Here? What name?"

"Anokhin... Colonel Anokhin... Ilya Alexandrovich..."

Maria hastily searched her memory. Colonel Anokhin... Ah, yes, of course...

"I'll just see," said the director, and turned to a thick book lying before him on the writing table. Behind the woman's back, Maria was making desperate signs to him. The director looked at her in astonishment. The colonel's wife turned round nervously.

"What's the matter, nurse? Do you know him?"

Colonel Anokhin... It was he who had died when she had received the notice of Grigori's death. An abdominal wound... He had taken so long to die, had suffered so terribly...

"I was away, that is to say, for some time I had no permanent address, and that was why... It's only now that I received the notice that he had been brought here, but that was an old notice, so that probably by now... Where was he wounded?" she broke off to ask, wiping her lips with a lace-edged lawn handkerchief.

"I'll just see," growled the director in confusion, slowly turning the leaves of the book. They stuck together and he blew in them to force them part.

"Anokhin... Anokhin... When was he brought here, did you say?"

"Back in November," Maria interrupted, then bit her lips. But it was already too late.

"You know him, nurse? You remember my husband?" asked the woman, starting up from her chair. Maria saw her pale, al-

most transparent eyes and the nervous tremor, barely visible, a quick flicker like the beating of a pulse, in the lid of the left one.

The director stopped turning the pages of the book and looked expectantly, guiltily at Maria.

"Yes, yes... Colonel Anokhin..." she whispered. The tall woman went up to her.

"Tell me, I implore you, tell me quickly, what has happened to my husband?"

Her voice snapped and broke off midway. Maria could not tear her gaze from the strange, pale face.

"Don't be alarmed. Sit down, please. I'll look," the director interrupted.

She obeyed and took a seat.

"Colonel Anokhin... What can I say... Colonel Anokhin died in the hospital on December 5th..."

"What?"

"Died... A serious abdominal wound, it wasn't possible to save him. Strange, that the notice..."

"I wasn't at home at the time," the woman began to explain, and again wiped her dry lips with her handkerchief. Her almost transparent fingers were trembling slightly. She lowered her head and again turned her pale eyes on Maria.

"Perhaps you looked after my husband, nurse?"

The woman was trying to preserve an easy tone which did not suit the subject. Maria shivered inside in the apprehension of she knew not what.

"Yes."

"Were you there when... when he died?"

Maria bowed her head.

"Yes."

"Do you remember, nurse... Of course, it is a comparatively long time ago... And probably a lot of people die here, don't they?"

"The percentage of discharges..." the director began, but she cut him short with a wave of her transparent hand.

"That's not what I mean... Then you remember? Please look at me, nurse," she said in a commanding tone, and as though hypnotized, Maria looked into those terrible pale eyes.

"I remember..."

"How was it? Please try to remember, I want to know, I must know every detail..."

Under the imperious pale eyes Maria obediently recollected, like a pupil answering in class.

"They sent for me... Said that the wounded man in ward seven was dying... That was Colonel Anokhin..."

"Ah, ward seven," repeated the colonel's wife, as though trying to fix it in her memory. "And then?"

"Well, I went upstairs..."

"Yes... And he was really already dying?"

"Yes..."

"And then? And then?"

"I straightened his quilt and changed the ice on his head..."

"Ice on his head... But he was wounded in the abdomen, wasn't he?"

"Yes, in the abdomen... The ice was because of the temperature..."

"I understand... Did he say anything? Did he?"

Maria tried to remember. The woman rose, without taking her eyes from her.

"Please, make an effort to remember. It's important, it's very important."

"Yes. He asked..."

The pale face froze in nervous expectation.

"What did he ask?"

It was a weak, hissing whisper. Her fingers gripped the back of the chair with such force that the knuckles stood out white.

"He asked... what was the communiqué... Because just then..."

"What?"

"He asked for the latest communiqué, because the wireless..."

The woman leaned forward, as though she wanted to throw herself upon Maria.

"And what else, what else did he ask about?"

"Nothing else. I told him, and then he... then he died."

"But the letter?"

"What letter?"

"He should have left a letter... There must be a letter... A letter to me... If he said nothing..."

"There was no letter... He could not write..."

"Ah, yes... Then you say that there was no letter and that he only asked about the communiqué?"

"Yes..."

The woman leaned her head against the back of the chair.

"Communiqué... Communiqué..."

Hysterical sobs rent the air. The woman was choking, gasping the one single word: "Communiqué."

The director ran to her. She pushed him away with unexpected strength. The fragile body fell full length on the floor. Maria dashed to catch her head. The pale eyes rolled under their lids, the blueish whites flashed. The shaking body writhed on the floor, a scream burst from the white lips, broken fragments of the word: "Communiqué," and then: "Dead, dead, dead!"

Another doctor came running, nurses. Maria went away. She ran along the corridor, pursued by that terrible cry, with nothing human about it: "Dead! Dead! Dead!"

Suddenly, like a blinding flash of lightning, like a roll of thunder and the rumble of a falling wall, she felt, saw, heard the unheard-of truth: Grigori was alive!

This was not what she had talked about with Vorontsov, down there by the river. The curtain was rent, and a blinding light flashed on her eyes. It thundered, rang, shouted in a thousand voices: "Grigori is alive!"

"And again that horrible fear—what if it is already too late? What if he should die just now, before she had time to run home to him, and she would never, never be able to say the words that she must say, and he would take with him all that had been up to now, and not even know that she..."

"Quick, quick!" She forgot everything. She did not stop to put on her coat, but ran out into the street as she was, not answering some question the porter put to her. "Quick!" cried the street. "Hurry!" ground the tram. "Quick, quick!" repeated her heart, beating chokingly. If only it wasn't too late, not too late!

And in this storm whirling forward, the sound of the voice upstairs was lost, that horrible, inhuman voice of the pale woman: "Dead! Dead! Dead!"

Two or three more steps. An incredible joy carried her as on wings, mingled with a fear lest she be too late. The key, the key in her bag! She could not find it, her trembling fingers fumbled among papers, crumpled ruble notes, a crushed handkerchief. No, here it was. It was difficult to get it into the keyhole. Grigori was not dead, the official notification had been a mistake. All for nothing the cruel, hopeless days, when she had thought that he was dead, that she would never, never again see him, touch his hand, hear his voice...

An unbearable weight seemed to have slipped from her shoulders, an evil nightmare which had held her in its grip for so long had disappeared. Grigori was alive, Grigori was alive!

If... if... good God, if only it were not too late! Without taking the key from the lock, she ran down the corridor and burst into the room. He was there. He was sitting before the table drawing something with difficulty with his left hand.

There was something childishly helpless, childishly pitiful in his whole figure, in the effort which his work cost him, still unused as he was to his mutilation. A wave of boundless tenderness swept over Maria. She had hurt a child, a helpless, unhappy child. Now she saw a new side to her love. He was not only husband, lover, comrade—he was her only, dearly loved child, needing her protection, her help, her tender care. A warmth she had never before now felt flooded her heart.

"Grishal"

She dashed to him, fell on her knees, embraced him. He was here, her Grisha was here! She could feel the warmth of his body close, close to her. She choked with happiness.

"Mariikal!" he said in a strained voice, unlike his own. She felt his hand on her hair. Looked up with happy eyes. Yes, yes, that was her Grisha. Her Grisha's face, crushed by the evil hand of war, an eye burned and crushed by an enemy shell. It was the first time she had looked at it close. And now it seemed quite different to her. No, it was not true that there had been days when those seams and scars had

prevented her from seeing her Grisha, her love, her happiness, her only man. A high, white flame of joy rose in her. She felt that he was alive, she could press herself to him, feel his hand on her hair, hear the loud beating of his heart.

"Mariikal!" he repeated the second time. And Maria saw that there were tears in his eyes.

She rose. Passed her hands over the loved head and pressed it to her heart.

"Grisha, Grisha, Grishal!" she repeated. She had found him after a long journey. She had emerged from the gloom into a sunny azure valley. It was the whole world that she held in her embrace, the whole world. The bad dream had dissolved. The nightmare had disappeared. Now she was awake—Grisha was alive. She pressed her lips to his fair hair. What soft, fine hair Grisha had, how well she remembered its faint smell...

"You're alive! Alive! Alive!" she kept repeating in a whisper, choking with her sudden happiness, her joy. She had not been too late, nothing was lost, nothing had been erased with the icy fingers of death...

"You're alive! Alive! Alive!"

She sat down on the arm of his chair, and snuggled down close to her husband. She did not want to let him out of her embrace for a second, she had found him, her own husband, the dearest person on earth had come back to her, a cripple, but alive.

He put his arm round her, but now her heart did not stop beating at the thought that this was his only arm. There were her two arms, young strong arms. And his hand was just the same—a large, sunburned, man's hand.

"Grisha, Grisha, Grisha..."

She rocked back and forth in time to the word, rocking him as a mother rocks her child. He was with her, her child, her lover, her husband, the whole world in her embrace.

Her lips touched the high forehead, the dark brows, the clear eye of Grisha, his lips. Tears were running from that eye—whose tears were they, hers or Grisha's? They ran together, mingled, and their taste on the lips was salty and sweet. They laughed through their tears, laughed one to the other with quiet, happy laughter.

No, he asked nothing. No explanation was necessary. Again they were as they had been—heart to heart, their gaze sinking deep into each other's eyes, eyes that understood all without need of words.

Seconds passed, minutes, hours. Suddenly her eye fell on the clock. She jumped up.

"Good heavens, how late it is! I'm starving you! Grisha, let's have a party. I got a bottle of wine yesterday. I invite you to supper!"

"Invitation accepted!" He bent his head in a mock bow.

How many times it had been like that before—a free evening, plans where they should go. To the theatre? But it was probably too late to get any tickets. To the pictures? To see their friends? And in

the end: "You know what, let's make our own party—that's best of all..."

And they would arrange everything as though for visitors. A clean tablecloth, the best plates and the only crystal goblet for cigarettes, two liqueur glasses: "Your health, Maria!" "Your health, Grisha!"

And then they would keep recollecting it for a long time: "Remember how late we went to bed that time, and how long we talked?"

Maria fussed around. The white embroidered tablecloth. A little darned, but never mind. Two glasses. Cheese, tinned fish, the bottle of wine.

"Where's the corkscrew? Open it, Grisha," she said without thinking, putting the bottle on the table, and then froze. But Grigori flung his hair back dashing.

"At your service, Madam!"

He pressed the bottle between his knees, took the corkscrew in his left hand, and in a moment the bottle was open.

"Here you are!"

"How well-trained you are!" she laughed.

Grigori poured out the wine and she pushed the chairs up to the table.

"Kindly sit opposite me, there."

"No, no, I want to be here, beside you..."

To feel the warmth of his shoulder. To be close to him, close, close. So that nothing should separate them from each other, nothing come between them.

"Your health, Mariika!"

"Your health, Grisha!"

The wine was tart, it brought a perfume of the far-off sunshine, and grapes from the hills lying under the clear, pure sky. Sunshine? What was it that Vorontsov had said to her? Actually, he had said only one thing, that if it had not been for Sonya...

"You're alive, alive, alive!" she sang suddenly, in a high trill, like a waterfall.

"What a discovery!"

She smiled and rubbed her cheek against his. It was ridiculous, but it was only today that she had come to realize that he was alive. All happiness was in that one word, with its joyful triumphant meaning.

"Your health, Grisha!"

"To victory, Mariika!"

"To victory!"

The glasses rang like real crystal. The wine was tart, and carried the perfume of grapes from the distant hills, a gay perfume bringing boldness and courage.

"Sing, Grisha..."

She closed her eyes. Grisha's song, that same song. From the broad steppe, from the expanses of their country came a young fellow, Grisha. The wind played with his fair hair, the wind carried a winged melody. Over the steppes walked a young fellow, Grisha. He opened his arms wide. He was following a glorious cause, Grisha, and the clear wind was blowing in his face.

Grisha's voice, his voice. No, nobody had ever sung that song as he did. And there, in Beryozovka, and later, and in her thoughts, when in her loneliness she had

heard Gricha's voice singing somewhere close to her, perhaps only in her heart...

Here it was, happiness, the stern and just, deep happiness of love. Here he was, her Gricha, the same as in Beryozovka, the same one who had walked with her under the apple-trees, returned to her from the distant paths of war, and she must help him, support him in the struggle he would have to wage with his mutilation, in the work he had resolved to continue with his remaining left hand...

What had it been, that terrible, impossible nightmare of the last month? But perhaps it had really been just a dream, a bad dream?

"Mariika..."

"What, dear?"

"Forgive me..."

She took fright.

"What is it, dear?"

"There... at that time... You see, I thought..."

She understood.

"It's all right, it's all right... Don't, it's better as it is... Ah, how good it is!"

Yes, yes, he had doubted her, had wanted to go away, to flee, wanted to hide himself, to leave her alone, wanted to be dead to her. Was it not that doubt in him which had given birth to the evil thing in her, was it not his doubt that had cast that dark seed into her heart, which had grown into an evil weed and choked and darkened life? Who was the first to be guilty, which of them had started it all? Who was the first who had sinned against life, against love? Though for that matter, it was of no importance now, everything was good—she and Grisha, Grisha and her—boundless happiness...

"Sing, Grisha!"

He had been pitilessly mutilated by the hand of war. But all the same, nothing was changed—it was he, her Grisha. She found his voice, and his smile, and his glance. All the past days gathered round them, linked up with each other, great joys and small, passing griefs and deep sorrows. No, no enemy bayonet, no enemy blow could cross it out, erase it, change it. Grisha was still Grisha, and that was how it would always be, to the end of their lives.

But now the word "end" was an empty sound, void of meaning. This was the beginning of life, their bright morning, the dawn of day, youth and joy.

"Grisha, Grisha, Grisha..."

"Mariika..."

Yes, that had been only an evil, impossible dream. For an instant she tried to recall what she had felt when she had seen him that day, to understand what it was that had happened. But she saw only the familiar face, the beloved features which she had so often kissed. Weals, scars, all that was something superficial, something unreal. Grisha was still Grisha, and nothing could change that. Neither his voice, nor his smile, none of what was essentially him, really him.

"It was bad without you, Mariika, oh, how bad it was!" he said tenderly.

And she knew that it was not the time when they had been parted that he meant, when they had been far from each other, but that time when they had met again, the bad days in the hospital and here, at home.

"Quiet, quiet, I'm here with you, for ever, you understand, always with you," she whispered in his ear, as though she were confiding some great secret to him. "And you'll be with me always, always, won't you?"

"Always, my beloved..."

"And you'll not go away from me, not ever?"

"My darling!"

Outside the window dusk was falling. The darkened street lamps were lighted. From there they could plainly distinguish the outlines of the bridge and beyond it, the high walls and towers of the Kremlin.

Now she found the words which she had sought for with so much effort previously, in the hospital. She thought: "All the terrors you have gone through I shall wipe away from your eyes. I shall teach you to smile again, re-awaken in you the joy of life which used to seethe in you. I shall take every stone from your path, note every hindrance and remove it in time. I will put everything your hand needs within reach, so that you may not feel the need of a second hand. I shall look at you, with such delight that no one will ever think that weals and scars disfigure you."

But now there was no need for her to say all this. Now he knew it all without any words—both he and she knew it in the depths of their hearts.

Grigori suddenly started.

"Turn on the wireless, turn it on quick!"

She plugged it in. Of course, Grigori was right that time too. Something gurgled and whirled on the black disc, just like water boiling. And then, sweetly, penetratingly, the signal tune sounded:

"Wide is my country..."¹

Clear, crystal, silvery sounds.

A bell rang in the entry. Maria ran hastily to open the door. Vorontsov was standing there. She fell back, as though somebody had struck her in the breast.

"Good evening, Maria..."

She did not invite him in, she stood there in the doorway, looking into his face with frightened eyes.

"The train leaves at ten tomorrow morning. Have your things all ready, I shall come for you at about nine, on the way to the station."

She turned pale. She wanted to reply at once, but her voice died in her throat.

"The tickets, the transfer to other work, it's all arranged."

Maria became calmer. Quietly, but distinctly, pronouncing each syllable carefully, she said:

¹ The signal-tune played by the Moscow radio before the announcement of a victory—is the first bars of a well-known patriotic song: "Wide is my country..."

"Victor, I'm not going anywhere."

He did not understand her.

"We'll be there on Friday."

"I'm not going anywhere," she repeated, "Don't be angry, I..."

"Maria, what has happened? Only yesterday... Why, it was all agreed! Maria!"

She bowed her face.

"No, no, Victor, we made a mistake..."

He seized her hand.

"What are you saying? Who's been mistaken? I? No, I love you, you know it well, I've loved you for a long time... And you... You told me plainly..."

"I made a mistake," she repeated.

"How were you mistaken? You said that you did not love me, what mistake could there be there?"

The announcer's loud voice could be heard from the room, reading the Order of the Day. She listened, wanting to know what town had been taken.

"Maria, why don't you reply?"

She came to herself.

"Yes, of course, I said that I didn't love you, but agreed to go away with you..."

"There, you see!"

"But I made a mistake..."

"Listen, don't drive me mad! What's happened?"

"Nothing, only there was one thing that I didn't know..."

"What was that?"

"That I... That I..."

"For God's sake, Maria, tell me what it's all about?"

She looked over Vorontsov's head to the door. Took a deep breath into her lungs.

"Because I... love Grigori."

"Maria, what are you saying?"

But in that moment her calm returned to her. She felt the high, even flame of happiness burning in her heart. That flame which had given her strength and joy in difficult days. That flame which had given her words the strength of truth, enabled her to save men, to bring them out of the gloom of despair. And here it was again in her, her strength, her will, her inspiration.

"You want to remain with him?" he asked in a dull, dead voice.

"Yes, I want to stay with him," she repeated, as though the words were a vow.

"Such a sacrifice, Maria..."

She interrupted him:

"You are wrong, it's no sacrifice, Victor."

"And what do you think it is, then?"

"Just... Just love," she said softly, distinctly.

Vorontsov started. Her voice had rung like music. He looked at her as though he were seeing her for the first time. She stood there in front of him, her shining bright hair a halo, a golden cloud, radiating light. A calm face, clear, serene eyes looking straight into his. He was amazed. This was the old Maria standing there before him, as she had been before receiving the bad news of Grigori's death. It was that Maria whom he remembered from the time of those happy days when she had been with Grigori.

The shadow had disappeared from her lips and from under her eyes as though with one sweep, the sufferings of the past months had been wiped from her face, returning the almost childish freshness, illuminated by an inner light.

Yes, that was the former Maria, there was nothing to be said.

"Well, then... I wish you every happiness, Maria," he said, looking about him for some reason, as though seeking something although his portfolio was in his hand, and he had not removed his hat.

"I'm happy. Don't be angry with me, Victor... You..."

"Don't," he interrupted her sharply. "You needn't bother yourself about me."

Grigori's voice suddenly sounded from the room:

"Maria, come quick!"

She had run back before Vorontsov had time to close the door behind him.

"Where have you been all this time? Here's the first salvo!"

She sat down on the arm of the chair and put her arm round Grigori's neck. A lightning flash cleft the air. Somewhere, far away, a red light flared up. Rockets crackled and flung their golden, green and scarlet stars over the dark sky. Thunder

rolled and echoed. The earth groaned. The stars fell, leaving a bright track in the sky. The last red lamp still hung in the heavens, falling slowly like a leaf to earth, then the echo of the thunder died down and darkness fell outside the window.

"Two," Grigori counted, and again the blinding light flared. Out of the darkness, the serrated Kremlin wall and towers stood out. The distance assumed a bright blue colour. A gun salvo roared, and the light flared, bright as day.

"There, there, look!"

Rockets flew up, a green fountain. They scattered in the air, and fell like the branches of a weeping willow. For a moment they hung there, then disappeared, leaving a cloud of golden dust, a trembling haze glowing in the dark sky.

"Three..."

Yes, yes, she had been right, Vassya's girl. Let people see, let them look at her Grigori, Grigori whom Moscow was saluting in the name of the country with those salvos...

Just love, said the rockets. Just love, thundered the guns. Just love, wrote the green, purple and gold streaks in some secret language of their own over the heavens.

Translated by Eve Manning



Spanish Masquerade

Drawing by Kukryniksy

OFFICERS OF THE GUARDS

1. COMRADES-IN-ARMS

In October 1941, Vladimir Zhukov, a nineteen-year-old officer in command of a tank, was wounded by shell-splinters in the head and shoulder during a defensive action on the Volokolamsk Highway. The tank, spattered with the blood of its commander and with a damaged track, crawled away to the cover of a forest and from behind the trees continued firing down the shell-pitted road. This happened during those awful autumn days when Guderian's Panzer Army was moving down the highway towards Moscow.

As soon as the fighting died down for the night the radio operator removed his commander from the combat zone. Zhukov was weak from loss of blood and his parched lips still raved about the battle. At the dressing station he said good-bye to the radio operator and then... "I'll be back soon!" he said suddenly in a firm and confident voice. Zhukov was right: his youthful constitution could withstand anything, the wounds healed and he was soon back with his unit.

He was lucky in battle, and he himself believed in his luck. Although he got four more wounds after this first one near Moscow—in the leg, in the arm and another one in the shoulder—fate was kind to him. The doctors said that the happy, care-free character of the youth had a lot to do with it, and his jolly smile banished the shadow of death.

He got his sixth wound at Tomarovka on the Kursk Salient. This time even the doctors believed that the end had come: it was not so much the serious wound to his legs as the amount of blood that he had lost that made them despair of saving him. He was picked up unconscious on the battlefield near a tank which was still burning and some thirty yards away a German Panther, overturned by a blast of colossal force, lay with its turret buried in the black earth. He underwent three operations, the surgeons cut up his young body and stitched it together again and his comrades donated three hundred grams of their blood. What frightened him more than the wound was the idea that he had fought his last battle, that he would never again see the battlefield, never return to his brigade...

He usually got over his wounds at a dressing station or a base hospital so that it was easy to get back to his own unit. This time he was evacuated in a critical state to the hospital at army base. "My song is sung," he decided. The tall, broad-shouldered colonel who commanded the brigade comforted him as he would a child,

stroked his head, promised to talk to the doctors and, pronouncing his "o's" rather round, like northerners, assured him in his deep bass voice and on his honour as a guardsman that they would fight together again... Zhukov was raving at his helpless position. "It's all over," he whispered and the colonel realized that things were not going too well with the patient.

"Guards Senior Lieutenant Zhukov," he said in parade ground tones, "I request that you show the necessary endurance!"

In the next bed in Zhukov's ward lay a young, rosy-cheeked lieutenant of the Guards with a slight wound in the arm. He was an argumentative and quarrelsome fellow and one evening, just as he was slipping out for a stroll, he said with all the simplicity in him that "you could tell a Guards officer a mile away—handsome, broad-shouldered, smartly dressed..." Suddenly the sharp voice of the officer, with the injured legs rang out through the ward.

"A lot you know about the Guards!" said Zhukov contemptuously. "What's it got to do with smart uniforms! Spiritual strength is what you need and not shoulders like a barn door..."

Gasping for breath, feeling that he had not strength enough to express everything that was swimming round in a head still hazy from concussion, he broke off suddenly. He only livened up on one occasion, when they brought him the letter from his brigade. In silence he listened while the nurse read the letter to him. She mispronounced one of the names and he hurriedly corrected her.

"Velkhovenko," he said and turning slowly round he added: "At Tomarovka he was on my right hand..."

For the first time he smiled, just as he did in the old days, a tender, childish smile. He spent another three months in hospital, his bones knitted, his flesh healed and there was new life in him. The Medical Commission was confronted with a difficulty: what was to be done with him? Lengthy and persistent requests on his part—"don't ruin a young life"—led the Medical Commission to provide Zhukov with a document which stated, briefly in official terminology that his six wounds restricted his fitness for active service and gave a detailed description of his splendid morale which should, in the opinion of the commission, make up for his sickness. He was sent to a sanatorium. He thanked the commission politely but refused to make the trip to Pyatigorsk. Home was the only place he would go to.

"They say that at home the very walls

help you," he said with a tender gleam in his eye.

He left the hospital still walking with the support of a cornelian cherry-wood stick, felt a bit dizzy and squinted in the bright sunlight; he took the road that led to the front... He was thin, seemed rather transparent. Heavy side whiskers that he had grown in hospital stood out on his gaunt face. As he walked on he hungrily drank in the smell of the offensive which was apparent on all roads on the lines of communication. The nearer he got to the front the greater the amount of traffic at night and in the early hours of the morning. He got a lift on a column of coupled trucks loaded with ammunition that were going his way, transferred to a powerful, fast-moving Dodge, spent his nights in villages near the road, in low white out-buildings that smelled pleasantly of mint and savony, got up at daybreak, washed in the cold water from the wells with the long, queer-looking levers and continued on his way down the road that was rose-coloured with the dawn. He crossed a wide river that now breathed peace and calm, heading straight for the west. He could, of course, have hunted up an army or corps headquarters, but he had a better idea—he wanted to report to his brigade straight from hospital. He knew exactly what that moment would be like. How glad they would all be to see him! He would walk into headquarters and ask permission to report to the brigade commander: Guards Senior Lieutenant Zhukov returned from a complete overhaul... The heavy, broad-shouldered colonel would shout through the open door: "Send him in here!"

Dreaming of this meeting the young officer made his way to the front.

By evening the officer reached his brigade headquarters. The colonel greeted him with a kind of rough friendliness. Placing his huge hands on Zhukov's thin shoulders he turned him this way and that.

"Let's have a look at that guardsman's soul of yours..." he said in his deep bass. Then he noticed the heavy growth of whiskers on Zhukov's cheeks.

"What's that?" he asked curtly.

"Sideboards," answered Zhukov; blushing in his confusion he added: "They give strength, you know."

The colonel laughed: "If they're for strength you can keep them." As Zhukov was falling asleep on a bed of freshly-mown grass in the bivouac that night he heard the voices of his friends Demchuk and Velkhovenko and it seemed as though he had never left the brigade, as though he were at home again just like old times.

He had arrived at the right time—the great 1944 offensive was just beginning. Zhukov's first battle was "something of a trial for him, he had been away from the front for almost six months. Everything went off all right, however, he shot accurately and well. The atmosphere of the attack did him good, he grew stronger, his face became tanned and his spirits rose. He was given a section, then a company,

and in the July battles, after his battalion had successfully crossed the Bug and the San he was appointed commander of the leading tank force which had the job of breaking through to the Vistula. Large formations had to sweep round in a big enveloping movement in the shortest possible time.

The Germans expected the Soviet tanks to advance in a straight line along convenient roads. It was here that they gathered their shock groups. In their plan of operation they measured our ideas by the yardstick of Prussian stereotyped methods. The Russians, however, adopted a different strategy. The starting point for the new drive in a direction which the Germans did not expect was at the confluence of two rivers. The movement of large army formations had to be carried out under such good cover and at such a high speed that the idea of operative surprise which underlay the whole plan should be maintained to the very end. The accomplishment of such a rapid forced march, mostly under cover of darkness, required officers whose principle of action was dictated by a spirit of energy and initiative.

Two Guards officers had to lead the advanced forces—Colonel Gussakovsky and Captain Zhukov. Gussakovsky was an old, experienced commander while Zhukov was new to the art of commanding a battalion. Would he be capable of such a job? His whole character seemed to make him a suitable officer for a battle aimed at breaking the enemy's line—he was a bold and determined officer. Dashing and fascinated with battle, perhaps a little too fascinated. If one may say so, he was intoxicated by the fighting. This side of his style of fighting was well-known in the brigade and was duly taken into consideration. The brigade commander wanted to let Zhukov down gently and so he spoke about him in the third person during their tête-à-tête.

"There are officers," said the colonel, "who always wait for orders from above, always wait for someone to set their imagination going. Then there are the others, those who require holding on the snaffle. They are ready to do everything themselves, not only on their own behalf but for everybody else as well."

"That's one for me," thought Zhukov.

"Yes," the colonel went on, "an officer of that character, despite all his undoubted positive qualities—personal gallantry, youthful daring—will only bring the task he has been given to a successful conclusion if he can inculcate in himself a sense of the responsibility of a commander."

Zhukov knew how to listen and take in his commander's instructions. After they had discussed the route and the plan for the breach the colonel took his leave of the young captain.

"That's the job we have to do," he said on parting; he made a sudden sharp thrust with his closed fist as though stabbing the air. "Cut through them like a knife!"

Zhukov's code name was "Knife." He remained with the battalion main body. In the van was his old friend, Senior Lieutenant Demchuk. The tanks advanced through

the pitch darkness with their headlamps extinguished. The steel treads of the tanks left wide scars in the rye and the main body of the battalion followed in these tracks, scarcely visible in the darkness of night. Fearing to lose direction Zhukov frequently got out of his tank and felt with his hands for the flattened tracks in the dew-wet rye.

He sent his patrol tanks out left and right, fanwise. They combed the fields and roads, engaged in short sharp engagements and disappeared again. Zhukov could not see them in the darkness but he could hear them, the communications were perfect. He had luck, luck that is in the sense that he discovered the ambushed German tanks in good time. The Germans lay low, apparently planning to allow Zhukov to pass on into the depths of the wood and then slam the doors of the breakthrough behind him. It would have been dangerous to slow down, to hesitate or show fear. On the contrary, he had to pretend that he had not noticed the ambush.

Zhukov's counterplan was to lay another ambush on the most probable line of the German attack. Part of his forces continued on their way while he, with Demchuk, Rybnikov and the Kazakh Jumabekov, the calm, reticent grandson of the poet Jam-boul, lay in ambush awaiting the Germans. In the grey light of the dawn a German tank crawled out of its hiding place in a grove of oak trees. In the misty darkness he mistook Demchuk's tank for one of his own and moved up to it as though it were his leading tank. Demchuk did well—he gave no sign. Then three more German tanks came out of the grove and moved confidently to the right after the first two. Still Demchuk was silent. One careless movement on his part might easily have scared the Germans. As Zhukov said, tact was what was needed. The rear tank was Rybnikov's and he moved calmly behind the Germans. All this happened in the course of two or three minutes. All three—Demchuk, Rybnikov and Jumabekov—awaited a signal from the battalion commander. He sent up two red rockets which meant: "Do what I do!" The Germans only realized the danger that threatened them when Zhukov's tank was already crushing the grass in the wood and the flashes of the Soviet guns lit up the trunks of the trees and the burning German tanks.

A second and a third time the Germans barred the way to Zhukov and his battalion. He parried their attacks and continued his advance. At all costs he had to reach the river. During a short halt in the woods the tankmen could smell the river. The sky hung low over the trees. The forest smelt of mushrooms and decayed leaves. It looked as though rain would soon fall. Together with the acute smell of rotting leaves, damp earth, together with the consciousness of the glistening spiders' webs that hung from the branches, there came to Zhukov in these moments of spiritual tension a feeling of strength such as he had experienced once before under different cir-

cumstances. A remote association carried him back to that autumn near Moscow, and to Volokolamsk Highway. The woods along the Volokolamsk Highway were also full of mushrooms. It had been raining at the time, the ground was soft and the brigade commander had asked: "Is it better to go slowly or rapidly during rain?" as he sent four tanks forward to guard a threatened sector. Laughingly he added that it was better to travel fast, then you would not feel the force of the rain. So it was in battle: in the intricate situations that arise in mobile warfare, passivity and slowness lead to heavy losses.

Zhukov could not accuse himself of slowness either then or now. As he advanced his speed increased and he gained time. The commander of the formation called him by radio and asked where he was. Looking at the map he heard Zhukov's answer and said in low tones: "I see, I see..."

The breach was effected by Soviet troops at the Polish frontier village of Makhov.

At dusk when Zhukov reached the western bank close on Gussakovsky's heels he was visited by the general. The general stared at the Guards captain in a strange way. It seemed to Zhukov that the general could not take his eyes from his sideboard whiskers that made him look like Barclay de Tolly. Yes, in the dust-covered Guards officer with the sideboards the general recognized the young tankman who had fought outside Moscow and who had now forced the river with a skilful manoeuvre.

"Knife?" asked the general. Nodding to him he went on quickly: "You know, the most valuable thing in your manoeuvring was the clever resourceful way you parried the enemy's blows with small groups. The rapid re-grouping and the counter-attacks were good... Just like Moscow, remember?... Guderian expected us in one place and we hit at him somewhere else..."

They were both veterans of the Guards' tanks—the tall, sun-burned general with the woolly Cossack goatskin cape flung over his shoulders and the gaunt young captain covered in dust from head to foot. They began to recall the fighting at Moscow. With a movement of his shoulders the general hitched up the cape that had grown grey from rain and the exposure of campaigns. The cape was also connected with the battle of Moscow, General Dovator had given it to him when they were neighbours defending the same line.

"Zhukov, d'you remember that night, October the 12th. We got an order to load the tanks up quickly and proceed to a threatened point. We wanted to travel faster than was usually permitted. We got our answer: 'Comrade Stalin gives his permission.' A day later we passed by night through the empty streets of Moscow. In the morning we took up our positions where we stood to the last man. Guderian did not get through!"

A light evening mist hung over the river. The fires lit by the troops on the river-bank showed up the dark forms of the heavy tanks with the long barrels of their

guns and the men who were busily making themselves at home on the tiny piece of ground they had won on the western bank of the great European river.

"Well, I'm keeping you," said the general

recollecting himself with a start. He pulled Zhukov towards him and said in a voice husky with emotion: "Where shall we meet next time, old guardsman? On the Oder? In the heart of Germany?..."

2. CREATIVE EFFORT

The regimental engineer was Guards Major Yegorov's most frequent visitor. They sat together till late at night, argued a lot and sometimes walked down to the river that divided our lines of defence from the Germans'. There was a comparative lull on that sector of the front at the time: after the long and bitter fighting of the summer came what is called an "operative pause." At any hour of any day a new offensive might begin. A concentration of forces was taking place, the staffs were hard at their painstaking, detailed work that demanded such great organizing skill, determination and patience. The Germans felt that they were comparatively safe: a river lay between them and the Russians. The whole difficulty was that the Guards division which occupied the forward positions would have to make their first step across that river. General Baklanov, the divisional commander, kept this fact foremost in his training of his officers with a view to accustoming them to the idea of the forthcoming attack across the river.

On September 6th he rang up Yegorov and enquired after his health. The major answered that malaria still had him on his back. He hung up; then a thought suddenly struck him and he began to worry. "The general didn't ask after my health for nothing, the offensive must be starting," he thought. Half an hour later he rang up Baklanov and in a hearty, cheerful voice, informed him that he was feeling quite well. He felt very well! Yegorov's premonitions did not deceive him, something was in the air. That evening there was a conference of regimental commanders and heads of the administrative services at divisional headquarters. Guards Lieutenant-Colonel Glonti reported on the state of the defences on his sector and the behaviour of the enemy; by leading questions the general brought him round to the most important subject of all—the offensive. He stressed the point that this was only a "check-up of ideas." Glonti gave a brief summary of his opinion, where the main drive should be made, where the infantry and artillery should be concentrated, where the main bridges should be thrown across and where dummy bridges should be built...

"And what had Dragomirov¹ to tell us about it?" asked Baklanov, addressing Yegorov.

This was true of Yegorov, he liked to quote military authorities at times. Yegorov respectfully, but in the same tone as the general replied that he had not had time

to seek Dragomirov's advice but that he had his own opinion. Taking off his horn-rimmed glasses the general looked closely at Yegorov and asked him to continue.

"I see that this plan does not please you... Put your cards on the table."

Yegorov quietly handed him a sketch map, showing his plan for forcing the river and breaching the German defence.

The new idea contained in this plan was that Yegorov proposed to build a dam higher up the river.

"What good will that do?" asked Baklanov, raising his head.

"It will do this," answered Yegorov and gave them a brief outline of his plan. His starting point was the fact that the forcing of the river would take a lot of strength and energy on the part of our troops and the rate at which the attack was made would be slowed down, especially considering that the enemy was well entrenched on the northern bank of the river. He had studied the river from all aspects—its depth varied from 0.85 to 1.60 metres, the velocity of the current was 15 centimetres a second, the bed was stony—and had arrived at the idea of building the dam. The dam should be built not across the Verkholenka, which would have to be forced, but across a nameless stream that ran into it. According to Yegorov's calculations the dam would have to be three metres high, which would reduce the depth of the river at the point of crossing to 30 or 40 centimetres so that it could then be forced.

"As though it were dry land," laughed Baklanov.

The divisional engineer said guardedly that he did not agree with Guards Major Yegorov's plan. The chief of staff, whom Yegorov had believed to be a dry-as-dust staff officer, came out openly and completely on Yegorov's side.

"This is an interesting idea," he said. "If you like to call it that, it is a plan to breach the enemy's line with the least possible losses."

The divisional commander said nothing, neither yes nor no. Yegorov's plan called forth a discussion, and Baklanov's comments only served to liven it up. He believed in encouraging his officers to express their ideas. He realized that "there are twenty different ways of doing everything." As he listened to his officers and their heated, impassioned discussion of Yegorov's plan he was proud of his division and his Guards officers.

The officers left late that night, only Yegorov remaining with the general.

"Your character is by no means angelic," he said jokingly to Yegorov. "You don't give yourself or anybody else any rest."

¹ Dragomirov—a Russian general (1830—1905); the author of numerous works on tactics. — Ed.

That's a bold scheme of yours. So carefully calculated, when you read it through you get the idea that 'Guards Major Yegorov wants to calculate the cost of a battle in roubles and copecks. You must have been a bookkeeper before the war?' he asked suddenly.

"In my young days," said Yegorov, speaking with some restraint, "I was a hydrotechnician."

The corpulent Baklanov snorted with amusement: "In your young days!" Anybody would think that Yegorov was over sixty! He said that he would soon be thirty.

"Coeval with the Revolution?" asked Baklanov.

"Almost," answered Yegorov, "I was born in 1918."

Suddenly he burst out laughing, remembering something amusing that had happened long ago.

"Now it's easy to talk about that but when I was younger I envied those who had been born in 1917, legal and official birthmates of the Revolution, as it were. I had a bosom pal, Nikolai Simbirtsev—he's a colonel in the tanks now. Every November Nikolai used to have an interview printed in the local newspaper: 'What I want to be' or 'What I dream of becoming'. He was born on the exact date."

"What is the depth here?" asked Baklanov suddenly, pointing to a mark on the map. As he talked with Yegorov it was obvious he was thinking of something else, probably of the dam.

The weary days passed, then at six o'clock in the morning Baklanov rang up Yegorov and told him that the people higher up had approved his plan. "Get on with the building!" The nameless stream ran through enemy-occupied territory but formed an elbow in one place which was held by Soviet troops. In this elbow, some sixteen kilometres from the point of crossing, they began building the dam.

In those days Yegorov looked like a builders' foreman—he was dressed in khaki overalls.

By the end of the third day a dam checked the flow of the river. The weather reports said that rain was possible between the 15th and the 20th. This worried Yegorov, but army headquarters had paid due account to it. In the morning the sappers were ordered to stop the flow of water in the nameless stream. By the next day the water level was considerably lower. On the day before the offensive began the divisional commander met his infantry officers and the commanders of attached troops. As he worked over the plan with a tall artillery officer, Yegorov caught himself thinking that he would like to say to that officer: "You dream of becoming a Guards officer. It's not easy." The gunner, however, disarmed him. With great respect he accepted all Yegorov's instructions.

For Yegorov, and not only for him, the

word "Guards" had a profound meaning. The right to the title of Guards officer had been earned in blood. Yegorov had been particularly fortunate, he had remained in one division throughout almost the whole period of the war. When the words "Oboyan," or "Vorskla" or "Krivoy Rog" were pronounced in the division, before their eyes arose a picture of the fighting on the Belgorod Highway, the break-through on the river Vorskla and the drive on Poltava, the battle to encircle the enemy near Krivoy Rog, powerful pictures of life which would always remain in our minds...

The offensive began on the 15th. All the fords on the ten-kilometre stretch of the break-through could be crossed by the infantry, tanks and guns. The trenches formed a horse shoe on a hill covered with undergrowth, bunches of rowan berries hung over the wide trench where Yegorov had his "office" hidden. A last few minutes remained before the offensive was to begin and the presence of the senior officers in his trench was confusing to Yegorov. He quietly walked over to a far corner, knelt down beside the telephone and called up the observation post that was situated right beside the river. The news was comforting, the water was at a low level. Yegorov felt a kind of tension inside him as though somebody were squeezing his heart to bursting point. The man standing on the hill understood Yegorov's mental state, understood it and sympathized with him. This was the divisional commander. In this hour before dawn he experienced feelings of pride and anxiety, happiness and concern about everything that had been done and was still to be done. He was able to remain calm, however, he could joke and take note of everything going on around him. He sought Yegorov with his eyes and smiled.

"We ought to put a notice in the paper," he said. "Today at five zero hours Guards Major Yegorov will read and defend a thesis presented for the degree of master of science (war). The subject of the thesis: 'Forcing a Water Obstacle and Simultaneously Breaching the Enemy's Permanent Field Works.' As the advertisements usually say, all those so desiring may attend..."

He looked at his watch and in quite a different voice said simply, and seriously: "Time!" Yegorov suddenly became a live wire. The low water level in the river enabled the troops to dash across to the north bank and straight into the enemy trenches. The advantage given by the surprise was increased by the tempestuous nature of the attack. The first phase of the battle was successful. In Baklanov's mind the dam that had made it possible to cross the river with comparative ease was only a springboard from which to hurl the whole division deep into the German positions. Babichev's battalion, and behind it, Glonti's units were to take advantage of the Germans' confusion, sweep round

them and reach a road beyond the river. The object of this move was to seize the road along which the enemy would retreat, lacerate his defences from behind and then join up with the forces attacking from the front. But disquieting news had come from Babichev, and then from Glonti: the enemy was making great efforts to throw our units back across the river. Glonti reported that he was taking steps to re-establish the position.

Baklanov knew from experience what this meant. If Glonti did not succeed in his attempt, the thread would break that connected the forces attacking from the front with those attacking from the rear. The enemy tanks might snap the thread, cut our forces in two and drive them back to the river. Would Glonti's forces have to be strengthened? This was the question with which Baklanov was now occupied. He sent his reserves to the sector on which Glonti was fighting, added tanks and self-propelled guns. He also sent a liaison officer to get a clear picture of the situation.

Yegorov arrived at the command post in the evening. The liaison officer also returned. The course taken by the battle was already known: the situation had been re-established, Glonti had slashed the road. The Germans were now caught between the hammer and the anvil.

"I reached Glonti at the time when he was repulsing the ninth counter-attack," said the liaison officer. "He was wounded but did not want to leave. What astonished me most of all was the calm atmosphere, the calmness and confidence of Glonti and all his staff there on the forward positions. Everything seemed perfectly normal. The mail had arrived and the field kitchens were in position." He fell silent a moment, then added quietly: "The self-propelled guns played their part in the battle, so did the tanks... But if it had not been for Glonti's character, if it had not been for the guardsmen strength of the regiment it would naturally have been more difficult to re-establish the situation and straddle the road."

Baklanov rolled himself a long, thick

cigarette, took a long, deep puff at it and turning to Yegorov told him that the "Boss" up above considered that the division had done well.

"We're doing well, very well," he added in a worried tone, "but you'll have to take that hill for me before morning..."

With his pencil he marked on the map a hill that was important for the development of the offensive. From that moment the map and everything connected with it, all its history, all the passion and the squabbles were pushed on one side together with the used-up sheet of the map. The offensive itself—a living being, full of fire and constant movement, brought new tasks for the guardsmen.

The battalion commanders came to Yegorov late in the evening. Their orderlies sat on the porch of the blue wing of a house at headquarters quietly smoking and discussing, probably, that which their commanders were talking about at regimental headquarters.

"We fight with our brains," said Vassili Ivanovich Fedorenko weightily; he was a man who enjoyed great authority amongst the orderlies.

One of them, Lavrik Chebotayev, stuttering and choking with sheer joy, told the others that he and his commander had taken possession of a count's palace; there were a hundred rooms there, each one bigger than the one before. Fedorenko angrily cut him short.

"We don't want palaces," said Fedorenko, giving them to understand that he and his commander condemned all desire for a life of luxury in wartime. "Where the Guards are, that's where we are! We're of one and the same mind..."

"What do you think, Vassili Ivanovich," asked Chebotayev ingratiatingly after a short pause, "shall we go straight on or make another flanking movement?"

Fedorenko did not answer immediately.

"That depends on the situation," he said evasively. Slowly, pausing between his words to give them weight, he repeated what he had heard his commander say: "The decision depends on a thousand factors..."

3. A GRAIN OF MANOEUVRE

When Soviet troops smashed through the enemy's defences and reached the Polish plains this summer I happened to see a map in the headquarters of one of our armies which recorded the opening phases of an operation that was bold both in scale and conception. The huge map, criss-crossed all over with coloured pencils, formed a graphic picture of the intricate movements made by masses of tanks and infantry. On the wide front on which the breach was effected our artillery and infantry had crashed through the German defences in a joint drive. Tanks had then poured

through the gap they made, slashed across roads, forced rivers, ripped the enemy's communications to pieces and, rapidly describing a huge arc, had thrust deep into the German defences and cut off an enemy grouping from its operative reserves.

An elderly general was standing by the map, a pointer in his hand. There was something in his appearance, in his calm manner of speaking and the way in which he formulated his thoughts that reminded one of a professor. If it had not been for the rumble of the guns one would have

thought that one was in a military academy.

"Now we will analyse the tasks of the first day..."

The young Guards officer with the thick shock of blond hair was already well acquainted with these tasks. He sat there cross-legged on the grass, his map-case on his knees—Guards Captain Bochkovsky, Hero of the Soviet Union, battalion commander. From the viewpoint of the general who saw the operation as a whole, that part carried out by Bochkovsky's battalion, the point of the spearhead which was a whole army, was nothing more than a pencil line, a tiny grain in a sea of troops that fought the battle. Who knows but that it was just this pencil line that made the bright dash of colour which gave the picture of the offensive its life-like character and its beauty—it was with great pride of spirit, like an old master who loves that which he has created, that the general spoke of this.

In army headquarters where the plan of the operation had originated, it was followed up by the staff, not just technically from the point of view of the numbers participating, but individually, from the point of view of who would carry it out. The task given was closely associated with the man. The character and qualities of the officer played an important part in the decisions of his superior. An officer with broad vision was necessary during those first hours after the gap in the enemy's line had been opened, an officer who would get a rapid and accurate grasp of the situation at that early stage in the battle.

The choice fell on Bochkovsky, whose friends called him the "manoeuvre officer." He had made a particularly good showing that spring in a masterly manoeuvre near Kolomyja when his mobile group had left the motor highway that was packed tight with the enemy, had broken through to the Pruth and pressed the Germans back to the river.... He was at times able to expand the narrow framework of the task in hand,—this was one of his strong qualities as a commander.

Bochkovsky loved to contemplate with his map, coloured pencils, dividers and his old oilcloth bound note book before him. That book was filled with laconic remarks—notes from real life all mixed up with dreams and profoundly secret thoughts. The book began with a note on the art of tank warfare: "Before the battle weigh up all the chances seven times like a good chess player before he makes a move, consider all possible variants, never think the enemy is a fool, remember that he may make sudden counter-moves and think out beforehand how to parry them."

Bochkovsky just loved this preparatory work with the battle plan. He liked working with his mind, living and impassioned, cold and sober. He made the first move on the map: "I will go this way, perpendicular to the highway." This move would lead to another in response: this is

how the enemy may react. He achieved clarity and accuracy in all details of the plan. With the company and platoon commanders he went through all the dynamics of the battle. He directed their thoughts into the channel of one impassioned determination—to carry through the operation at top speed. These traits of the guardsman—determination, stubbornness in the achievement of an aim, mobility of thought and feelings—were not only personal traits of the young captain, they were qualities which he passed on to the whole battalion.

Bochkovsky folded up his map. The task of the day was accurately laid out in the form of a time-table. It was, so to say, like the outline sketch of a future victory, the skeleton of it. The most important thing still remained—to breathe life into the sketch. The battle itself, teeming with surprises and critical situations, would develop its own new facets. Without this sketch, however, without this soundly based plan of action, he could not be confident of the outcome of the battle. Perhaps the entire, or almost the entire, art of fighting lay in ceasing to be a slave to this plan at the decisive moment.

The night before the battle the captain spent with three officers from a reconnaissance platoon. They had the first and the main problem to solve, that of going into the breach and getting a clear picture of the situation. The platoon was commanded by an officer named Posledovsky, a silent, reserved man of strong, if latent, temperament. In the opinion of the battalion commander all three officers, Posledovsky, Ilyin and Ovcharov, possessed the qualities needed for this operation. In the twilight Bochkovsky accompanied the platoon commander on an inspection of his machines. The tanks were covered with green boughs so that they looked like little green mounds with the barrels of the guns sticking out of them.

Ovcharov appeared from amongst the tanks. He was dressed in greasy canvas overalls. His whole short, broad-shouldered, strongly-built figure breathed health and strength. He was wiping his big scratched bruised palms on a handful of cotton waste. He wiped the perspiration from his face with the back of his wrist and threw back the blond hair that had fallen over his forehead.

"Good!" Captain Bochkovsky could not help exclaiming. "A Guards officer without any adornments just before the battle. Do you remember the old engravings? Napoleon's Guards officers, handsome and dashing, trousers stretched tight, high Hessian boots, waxed moustaches, fur caps... This is another century, a different Guards regiment..."

Just after three in the morning Posledovsky's platoon entered the gap ahead of the others and dashed far ahead of the main body. Posledovsky gave his position by radio. Then he began to report back everything he saw. The officers on reconnaissance stuck strictly to the instructions that

Bochkovsky had given them—as far as possible they were not to fight but were to get accurate information of the enemy's fire system and follow up all the details of the swiftly changing situation. In those early hours of the battle Posledovsky's reports were the chief source of information supplied to the battalion and the brigade and also to the infantry.

The movement into the gap was carried out with comparatively small losses. The first object which Bochkovsky set himself was achieved; the battalion had retained its striking power for the main task to be performed in the enemy's rear. Bochkovsky could read the map of the battle in progress, Posledovsky's radio messages gave him a clear picture of the movements of an enemy whose nearest reserves hung over the flank of our forces and were trying to strike at the base of the attacking wedge of tanks. In view of this the battalion's movement along the preconceived line was not advisable, it would simply be punching the air. That bulge on the right flank had to be cut off and, what was more important, it must not be allowed to grow. This was the conclusion to which Bochkovsky came as he read the reports of his officers. Their radio messages were dry and laconic but Bochkovsky knew the cost at which they preserved this calm. One of the radio messages read: "The Germans are attacking us." The drama of the three officers' situation was increased by the fact that their messages meant that they were changing the line of the battalion's advance and losing all chance of meeting Bochkovsky on the old line of advance.

Both sides, Bochkovsky and the officers at the reconnaissance platoon, understood this full well. Here, however, one of the decisive internal laws of the Guards came to the fore, the law of self-sacrifice. All three officers were trained psychologically for the task that was so full of risk and mortal danger. The contents of their messages were still dry and to the point; they continued to draw Bochkovsky's attention to the bulge, the "tumor," on the right flank. One of the radio messages, it was the last, broke off in the middle of a word. Bochkovsky himself and his radio-operator searched the air for them but all three were silent. The idea that they had all been killed kept running through the captain's head: it could not be true! The situation, however, required that he think of the battalion as a whole.

For all his youth Bochkovsky was inwardly calm. A dozen questions arose in his mind at once. He could take his tanks along the original, well-planned route, he could reach the objective of the offensive laid down in the plan, could dig in there and consider that he had fulfilled his orders. It would have been quite easy, but such a method of "eating up space" had no object. From the tactical point of view it was like firing a blank cartridge. He had to find the strength to reject the plan to which he had become accustomed and which

was fixed both in his mind and on the map, and follow up that same object, to get behind the enemy's defences, by new methods determined by the situation which had arisen. This new variant had its own difficulties: the Germans had concentrated considerable fire resources in the triangle formed by the road, the dam and the railway.

He asked himself whether it was necessary to take the risk, whether this move would help in the general plan of the offensive or whether his private movement would be left hanging in the air. Captain Bochkovsky experienced the greatest satisfaction as a commander when brigade headquarters sent him a message consisting of one word: "Approved." He disposed his tanks so as to achieve a double object: by fire from cover and sudden attacks to destroy the enemy's tanks on the move and to protect the infantry with a wall of fire and make it possible for them to advance.

Just after two in the afternoon—he remembered the thime—Dukhov and Kupriyanov whose tanks were nearest to the German-held dam, had to advance to the attack. Just at that moment, a tank lit up by the slanting rays of the sun got a fraction of a second ahead of them. The sudden burst which this tank made across the dam seemed to cut the thin thread of alarm that was in the still air. Whose tank was it? Where had it come from? Bochkovsky's tanks were all heavies and this was a T-34. The appearance of this grey, smoke-scarred T-34 rushing towards the enemy at top speed awakened a spark of mighty enthusiasm in the spirit of the tankmen. The T-34 drew the enemy's fire on itself. Crushing bushes under its tracks and manoeuvring back and forth amongst the trees the tank kept up a running fire on the German battery.

Bochkovsky opened the hatch of his tank and with one powerful movement raised himself up on his arms. Now he could see the T-34 head on and he recognized it. It was an old Guards tank that had earned particular respect and affection in the battalion. It had fought on the Kursk Salient, had forced the Dnieper and the Pruth and taken part in the breakthrough on the Bug. At Kolomyja the tank had lost its forward machine-gun. At one time it had been commanded by Ignatyev, then by Sirik, both of them Heroes of the Soviet Union. The machine had long been written off the list of fighting vehicles, it had been through three series of battles and lived out its life's span. Its whole body was scarred with wounds which the tankmen called "tears on the armour plating." But there were too many fond memories connected with the old tank so they had repaired it, replaced its gun and used it to pull the battalion kitchen.

When Bochkovsky went up to the tank after the battle the commander of the T-34 was standing with his back to him. Bochkovsky touched him on the shoul-

der. The tankman in the worn leather jacket turned round sharply. It was Ovcharov, one of the officers of the reconnaissance platoon. His face was dark, his cheeks sunken, only the deep-sunk eyes blazed in his young face that was so black from dust and powder. He spoke in short phrases with long pauses between them: his tank had been burnt. Ovcharov had got out of the tank safely and on his way back had met up with the second echelon transport. There was the old T-34; he filled it with petrol, took in a stock of ammunition... Ovcharov held a badly battered hand against his chest as though to ease a pain in his heart. The task of the day had been accomplished. Bochkovsky saw that the line of attack of the whole formation had followed that of his battalion. The hour had come when the battle had gone beyond the scale of that fought by one modest Guards battalion. That tiny grain of manoeuvre which Captain Bochkovsky discovered in the

course of the battle had already borne fruit: the offensive developed into a manoeuvre of a huge formation on a scale unusual for large masses, of tanks and an ever-increasing rate of attack.

...I met Bochkovsky three weeks after this battle. The speedometer of his tank showed nine hundred kilometres travelled by the battalion during the offensive. In a direct line this would have been four hundred kilometres.

"Who fights in a straight line?" asked Bochkovsky, unfolding the map in which he had sketched in the battalion's manoeuvre.

As I looked at Bochkovsky I recalled that there was this same light—the light of military passion, it might be called—in both the general and the battalion commander, which lit up the picture of the manoeuvre with the brilliance of soldierly thinking.

BORIS GALIN

SOVIET ACES

It happened in Rumania on a sparkling day in May when our forces were battling at Jassy. An unceasing cannonade boomed and reverberated among the mountains. From an air observation post scooped out of the mountain side under the massive foundations of an old and completely ruined castle I watched combats fought out in the clear blue sky.

We saw dozens of fights that day but there was one I shall never forget. About noon a heavy and rising drone filled the air. Three groups of German bombers were bearing down on us from the south. When the first batch was already over our forward positions the last wave was barely visible on the horizon. The general seated at the radio frowned, took up the headphones and microphone and left the dugout.

I also donned headphones and amid the riot of buzzing and crackling disturbing the ether caught an imperative "Vorwärts." The aircraft were running in to bomb. They were just about to release their lethal cargo when eight Soviet fighters, their wings glistening in the sun, swooped down on them. Our craft numbered only a quarter of the Germans but they attacked with such rapier-like swiftness, that, before the Messerschmitts' cover could intercept them, three Junkers were tumbling down, smoking and helplessly spinning wing over wing.

I not only saw the fight but heard it. The phones brought hoarse German profanity, the hard breathing of the battling pilots and their excited interchange of message. Then suddenly, cutting through the medley of battle sounds, came the

Something new in astronomy



*The Pokryshkin Constellation
Caricature by Benjamin Briskin*

distinct voice of the German commander. It was no longer imperative, but betrayed fright and exasperation.

"Achtung! Pokryshkin! Achtung! Pokryshkin!" he gasped.

And we saw how the eighteen Messerschmitts of the fighter cover just about to tackle our eight planes, went into helter-skelter retreat. A slight correction—their number was reduced to sixteen, for two of their number emitting smoke crashed amid the mountains. The sky was again clear in some two or three minutes: the German craft scampering off, wreaking havoc among the second and third formations.

"Well done, Pokryshkin!" said the general and right away asked for the names of the pilots engaged. He slipped off the headphones, wiped his damp forehead with the flat of his palm and sat down to smoke. He himself had been a fighter pilot and so understood the job down to its finest point.

"Did you hear how that German yelled? You have to be a real ace indeed to scare the enemy at the very mention of your name!"

Just then the general was informed that the pilots engaged were Grigori Rechkalov, Alexander Klubov, Andrei Trud, Fyodorov and others.

"And Pokryshkin?" asked the general. "Pokryshkin wasn't up this time."

The general roared with laughter.

"That takes the cake," he said. "They not only fooled the Germans but me too who knows them all by sight. Well, really, Pokryshkin is something more than a crack ace. Pokryshkin is a hall mark for Soviet aviation, a school of Soviet fighter pilots in himself..."

I recalled this talk long ago on the Pruth when I visited the famous air formation led by the thrice Hero of the Soviet Union, Guards Colonel Alexander Pokryshkin, now posted at the Vistula. It contains the unit in which he found his wings. In his turn he has trained a constellation of aces. The unit is now commanded by Alexander Pokryshkin's old service comrade, twice Hero of the Soviet Union, Grigori Rechkalov, who recently shot down his fifty-eighth German aircraft over the Vistula.

From the same happy family of fighters came Hero of the Soviet Union Pavel Kryukov, who once tackled four German fighters singlehanded and knocked down three of them; Hero of the Soviet Union Fyodorov, who has a flair for the right target to attack; Hero of the Soviet Union Andrei Trud, who, operating for a very short while, has already accounted for twenty-four of the enemy. Many other sound pilots are also numbered among their ranks.

These men differ entirely as to character, ways of life and their past occupations. They all possess strongly-marked individual features. Grigori Rechkalov is a former steel mill worker from Sverdlovsk:

smart, stern and difficult to please on the airfield, he's always the best of good fellows off duty. Fyodorov, from the textile mills, is a quiet, deliberate individual whose imperturbable calm has become a by-word in the unit. But all of them—the gay and debonair Andrei Trud, the group's "veteran" Pavel Kryukov and its "junior" Golubev—all fight in the same style, the style which has absorbed all that is best in present-day fighting aviation and finds its most vivid manifestation in Pokryshkin himself.

The biographies of these aces are also akin. Not one of them can recall pre-revolutionary Russia. They all came into the limelight as aviators only during the war. Their war records began on June the 22nd, 1941, when a squadron of Migs led by Alexander Pokryshkin took off from a flying field at Beltsy in Moldavia and winged to the Pruth to intercept an armada of Luftwaffe bombers violating the frontier.

Pokryshkin and his comrades fought above the hills of Moldavia, over the Ukrainian steppes, the flooded meadows of the Kuban, the peaks of the Caucasus. They tasted the bitterness of retreat and mastered the art of furious back-to-the-wall fighting. Then, accompanying the Red Army, they travelled the road of victory from the Caucasus to the Kuban, through the Donbas to the Ukraine to return to the spot in Moldavia where they had begun the war—the tiny flying field at Beltsy. Later they flew across the Pruth into Rumania and at the present they are patrolling the sky over the Vistula in Southern Poland.

The distinguishing features of Pokryshkin's and his friends' fighting style is inherent in Soviet aviation. First and foremost it means intrepid courage intensified by cool, complete mastery: it is superb art of attack, attack from above, when the pilot, getting the last ounce from his engine, puts his machine, with lightning speed, head on at the enemy, confident in his own superior nerve, sure that the enemy will falter and turn aside; it is constant dissatisfaction with today's achievement, an unflagging urge to fight better next time. Another typical characteristic is the realization that all useful battling experience must be passed on immediately for the common use. Finally it is the ability to understand always that war itself is facing them and no game so that the utmost must be demanded of yourself and your subordinates.

Hero of the Soviet Union Fyodorov relates an interesting incident. Pokryshkin led an attacking group, Fyodorov covered him. At one point during an attack Fyodorov thought Pokryshkin was in a tight corner, so, contrary to agreement, he swerved left to cover his commander. Before he could complete the move he heard an angry voice in the phones:

"Keep your place!"

It was hard to credit that Pokryshkin

himself had spoken for at that moment his craft, with all cannon and machine-guns blazing, was cutting into the enemy formation. Pilots well understand the terrific pressure of such a moment which calls for every ounce of concentration. Incredible that at such a time a commander should not miss what his partner was up to.

Colonel Abramovich, chief of staff of Alexander Pokryshkin's formation, gave me some illuminating figures. Pilots of the formation have fought 891 combats during

the war and shot down 1,041 enemy aircraft.

Grand figures! But what is still more important is that Pokryshkin and his comrades have climbed to such a pinnacle of skill that at the mere appearance of their machines the enemy turns tail. No sooner does this formation sweep aloft than the German radio emits the agitated warning: "Look out! Pokryshkin!"

BORIS POLEVOY

THE WILL OF A BOLSHEVIK

Illness first gripped his strong body after a stormy night spent at the Volnovakha station. For the Ukraine, the prevailing winter was an unusual one — strong blizzards with everything snowed up. Dozens of trains were stuck fast to the tracks, the snow reaching to their very windows.

The country was living through the difficult days of 1931. The crying need was for bread and the Ukraine had to supply three hundred thousand poods. For this purpose, a group of the finest men available were dispatched to this region.

Among these was Alexander Boychenko.

... One night he forced his way through to the Volnovakha station on a snow-plough. To proceed further was impossible. The route was completely blocked by the snow.

"Where are you making for?" asked the old engine driver. "You can't see anything in this blizzard."

"To the district committee. I'll get going. It's not far!"

Boychenko jumped from the steps and was immediately engulfed in a cloud of whirling snow. He bumped into a snow-covered train, crawled over the buffers only to find himself confronted with another. The tracks were crammed with railway waggons and he wandered around like a lost soul, heaving himself up and down steps, the wind stinging through him like needles. At last he saw before him a deserted snowy expanse.

Boychenko realized that he was lost. But the way back was even more difficult. His sheepskin coat seemed more like cotton material for all the warmth it afforded. The snow penetrated his felt boots and his mittens crackled like so much tin plating when he grasped the handles of the train waggons. The hellish cold gripped his entire body. At dawn with the help of a passer-by, he made his way out of the labyrinth and came upon some dwelling houses.

He was brought down with a severe illness which racked him all through but his organism did not give way.

"Your recovery is by no means completed," said his doctors. "You must still continue the treatment."

But to stay longer in bed was impossible. His work called. He, the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Ukraine's Youth Organization, must be in the forefront during these difficult years when national economy was being reconstructed, when collectivization and industrialization were under way. No, he must be up and doing!

Still half sick, he made the rounds of the Ukrainian factories and helped the young workers to build the first Youth blast-furnaces.

In the Donbas he instilled the youth leaders with perseverance, the ability to overcome difficulties, and to exert every ounce of strength and energy for their country's welfare.

The chill draughts and damp of the coal mines played havoc with Boychenko's health and he was brought to Kharkov seriously ill. Four years saw him tied to a hospital bed unable to move except his hands. During the long days and nights spent in the hospital his gloom was relieved by the bright thought that all was not yet lost, that there was distinct hope of recovery, that, in any case, he still possessed hands, eyes, brain — he could still study, read and work.

His wife and friends comforted the sick man.

"Don't grieve, Sasha. You have seen and learned a great deal. You will write for the youth."

One day the doctor said:

"I've done everything possible. However, if you wish, my friend will treat you. But this will entail a serious and painful experiment — and it's the last hope."

Boychenko expressed his willingness. The experiment failed, however, and with it went all hopes of recovery; his joints became more and more calcified, his body more petrified and it was only his inexorable will to live that forced his brain to function.

Alexander Boychenko now realized the bitter truth: never again would he rise from his bed. Yet this hopelessly sick man wrote a book about the youth — an optimistic, militant book.

Boychenko had thought out his book during his sleepless nights in the hospi-

tal. Confined in the plaster casts, he had already lived through the lives of his heroes. These he selected from among his former comrades—the Youth. Himself the son of a fitter, Alexander Boychenko had begun work at sixteen years in a railway repair shop, later becoming an electro-mechanic's assistant. At seventeen years he joined a detachment fighting banditry in the Kiev region during the Civil War. Many of his comrades-in-arms were mown down by enemy bullets and these were mercilessly avenged by Boychenko in battle.

He devoted the whole of his stormy experiences to the Youth. He had first been secretary of a Youth group, then secretary of the Youth District Committee and later secretary of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Youth Organization.

For several years Boychenko was engaged on this book "Youth." At first his "workbench" consisted of a kind of slanting lectern fixed over his bed. To this his notebooks were fastened and he was able to read and correct his work himself while his wife or children turned the pages for him. Boychenko worked without sparing himself. He became editor of a Ukrainian publishing house, wrote articles for various newspapers and magazines and worked on his book.

But the disease gradually ate into his entire body. He could only lay on his spine and barely use his hands or lift his head an inch from the pillow. He lost the sight of his right eye and in order to conserve the sight of the other, it was decided that others should do his reading for him and that his wife should write from his dictation.

Alexandra, the author's wife, was a warm-hearted woman who sacrificed herself and everything to ensure her husband's comfort and to enable him to carry out his plans. Day in, day out—year after year, she was accomplishing this duty.

In 1939, Boychenko was engaged in editing a series of books dealing with the heroic youth during the Civil War. When we visited Boychenko at his country-house to ask advice about one of these volumes, we were met with a warm welcome.

Discussing this book, he said:

"I can well understand a man going to meet his death for the victory of our cause—that is noble and just. I believe that millions of our people would similarly scorn death in defence of their motherland. Although this heroism is hidden beneath the surface, it will undoubtedly rise at the decisive moment. In depicting his heroes, an author must not lose sight of this fact."

At the fronts of the Patriotic War we frequently recalled these penetrating and prophetic words and pondered over the fate of their author. How had he fared during the grim days of the German invasion? What had happened to his unfinished work?

In the autumn of 1941, Boychenko was

evacuated from Kiev. The journey was a terrible one, illuminated en route by explosions. He and his family eventually found refuge in a remote Volga village bearing the pleasant name "White Fields." Life here was none too easy, but he wasted no time in self-pity but got down to work. From his plank bed he continued to dictate his book, often revising it until he had rewritten it seven times! Persevering, superhuman achievement!

The frosts came. The food was none too good. The Germans were at the gates of Moscow and overrunning the Ukraine. The fate of the motherland was being decided in fierce battles.

The local collective farm preparing for the spring sowing, was faced with a lack of hands and machinery... Boychenko was elected assistant secretary of its party organization. He knew every village inhabitant by name, was interested in all their doings and remembered the slightest detail. The affairs of the collective farm were discussed in his room and from there he edited its newspaper.

Despite the greatness of his own needs he never forgot those of others. To the wife of the Red Army man, Kozarenko, who had been evacuated to this same village with her three small children, Boychenko sent his daily milk ration.

The book was finished and the manuscript submitted for review. Came the good news that the book was accepted for publication. For Boychenko, this was a victory won at the cost of super-human effort. Then, suddenly, came fateful tidings: during the new evacuation the enterprise had lost the manuscript!

Exerting tremendous will-power, the author forced himself to take up his work anew. Luckily, he had kept his notes and much was still fresh in his memory. Before long a new manuscript was ready. Boychenko moved to Ufa where his friends counselled: "Keep smiling, Sasha, we'll soon be back in the Ukraine."

But his strength began to fail. The difficult journeys, the excitement and his titanic endeavours all told on his heart. Also gangrene started up his leg. He was unable to swallow food and lost consciousness. Academician Strazhesko, a well-known doctor, visited the sick man, and he realized that decisive measures must be taken if the patient was to survive.

"I don't intend to die yet, Shura, so don't cry, don't lose heart," he told his wife, just before a major operation. His leg was amputated and his health somewhat improved. The author was torn from the very jaws of death.

Once again his native Kiev—his cosy room. Flowers everywhere and from his windows the view of the magnificent park overlooking the Dnieper. Happy days and pleasant vistas for Boychenko. A Moscow publishing house has his book in hand; the proofs have been gone through for the last time. Life seems to have begun anew, for the author, Boychenko.

VALENTINE SHUMOV

HEROES OF THE BREAK-THROUGH

Gold-tinted leaves fluttered over the rivers and forests of Lithuania as the dawn broke on that cold autumn morning.

The forest stillness was deceiving. The tall pines and birches hid heavy siege guns ready for battle. Gun crews waited for the "fire" signal. Under every bush, in every tent, trench and hut, and spread out on the grass in various postures were riflemen, machine, tommy-and mortar-gunners. At the entrances to the front line trenches, point-blank firing guns and anti-tank gun crews stood screened from view.

A spell seemed cast over everything. There was not a sound or a murmur. The same quiet reigned in the German positions.

The minutes of waiting seemed endless. As the clock's hands approached eleven, the colonel, glancing at his wrist-watch, ordered: "Fire!"

The forest came to life in a split second. The earth trembled at the thunder of artillery and the batteries emitted a hurricane of fire against the German positions...

The enemy divisions which had attempted in vain for a whole month to break through our lines north-west and south-west of Shaulai, here came up against a stone wall.

Having harassed the picked enemy tank and infantry divisions, that morning our forces launched decisive offensive operations. Reinforced vanguard units under cover of artillery and mortar fire and aviation delivered an unexpected attack on the Germans.

The German front-line and their defence installations were pierced by storm. The men of the advance rifle units forced the river Venta, whose high steep banks had served as a powerful natural defence barrier for the enemy.

In one day a seventy-five kilometres wedge was made in the enemy defence lines. Soviet infantry, tank- and artillerymen fought their way fifteen kilometres ahead.

An observation balloon lay in readiness in a cleverly constructed excavation. Gunners and balloon crew made their final preparations for the coming battle.

The unit's commander, captain George Konovalchik, gave his men a final check-up and then ordered:

"Up you go!"

As the balloon gained altitude, the field of battle became as clear to the aerial observers as the palm of their own hands. Complex military operations were carried out in the small car. The correction from the air was faultless and our artillerymen directed their fire against the enemy batteries now in action.

Three times in one day our valiant balloon crew ascended to the skies. Each time the Hitlerites opened fire on the "blimp" but the air correctors did not cease their work and the Soviet batteries continued to inflict defeat after defeat upon the Germans.

The enraged fascists sent their aviators after the observers. Two Fokke-Wulfs fired at the "blimp", subjecting it to a shower of lead. The envelope was hit eighty-three times and the car sixteen.

The balloon crew bailed out with parachutes. The Germans thought that was the end of the balloon but a few hours later, in another spot the air correctors continued their work, having repaired all the damage inflicted by the enemy's air attack.

Everywhere, on land and in the air, Russian men and officers displayed exemplary courage and dauntlessness.

Tommy-gun detachment commander, Hero of the Soviet Union, Rudakov, fought valiantly against the Germans in these new offensive battles. The incessant and close mortar fire of the enemy held up the guardsmen, and they lay low in the trenches deserted by the Germans.

Two tanks and a self-propelled gun came to the aid of the infantrymen. As the former approached the trenches, the tankmen slowed down. The trapdoor of the first tank was thrown open and a blackened face in a leather helmet appeared.

"Get in, boys, we'll take you nearer to the Germans!"

Rudakov didn't wait for a second invitation. The guardsmen rose to their feet and protected by the trustworthy armour of the tanks once again hurled themselves against the enemy. The tommy-gunners were dropped at a forest village surrounded by barbed wire while the tanks and self-propelled gun with a thunderous roar attacked the enemy's firepoints, crushed the confused Germans under their caterpillars and smashed their blindages.

The tommy-gunners broke into the forest village. Four healthy, well-fed Germans with their hands high above their heads jumped out from around the corner of their gloomy transportable house. In their fright they shouted loudly:

"Russ, hurrahl Russ, hurrahl!"

Rudakov who had been prepared to "refresh" these Hitlerites with a spray of tommy-gun fire, burst out laughing:

"You should be shouting 'help', and here you are yelling 'hurrah'. Lie down!" he ordered, upon which the four Germans obediently lay flat on their stomachs, on the ground.

From wretched holes in the earth and damp barracks sodden through and through by autumn rains, emaciated people emerged. With lustreless and frozen eyes they peered into the faces of the guardsmen and uncertainly approached them with outspread hands.

"Ours?"

"Comrades!"

"Sons!"

The black torture-chamber of the hitlerite slave-owners and butchers was revealed to the advancing fighters. In this unnamed forest camp languished Russian people sent to forced German labour.

Little was said during those first moments of reunion. All that had been thought and suffered in the three years of slavery found its expression now in tears, kisses and handshakes.

The happy moment of liberation was both triumphant and terrible in its grimness. It seemed as if a mob of forest tramps and beggars had suddenly arisen before the men. Old Russians in remnants of German uniforms, worn and completely covered with patches... Women and girls in rags that barely concealed their bodies... Children, emaciated with hunger, their skin covered with scabs and feverish rashes...

It was the shadows of men that came to meet their liberators; tortured people, haggard from slave labour and inhuman degradation—Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, nearly all either old men or adolescents. The fifteen-hour working day applied to everybody here. The food consisted of two hundred grams of ersatz bread and a concoction of oats. The cemetery was situated next door and all the paths from this terrible camp led to it.

Rudakov made a slow inspection of the barracks. The sergeant halted on a platform near a signal post from which hung a gun case.

Yellow leaves fell from the white birches swaying in the wind. The soldier's heart beat painfully in his breast. It seemed to him that never yet during any battle, even when death was a hair's breadth away, had he felt such reluctance to go forward.

Letting fall his hand which clenched the barrel of his gun, Rudakov took another step forward.

Alongside a deep ravine, on a bundle of rags sat an old woman. On her knees was a blackened red tin can with a wire handle, a sorry imitation of a pot. One of the men gave the old woman a piece of dried bread. She dipped it into the turbid unboiled water and munched it greedily, nervously glancing around her, as though afraid someone might snatch it from her.

Rudakov felt a cold chill creep down his spine. He bent down and once more looked into the face of the old woman, saying brokenly and in a scared voice:

"Mama!"

The bread fell from the shaking, wrinkled hands. The charred can rolled away, spilling the water. The old woman, breathing heavily, got up and big tears rolled down her cheeks:

"Lyoshenka, my child!"

The mother of the hero, in the sorry rags of a German slave, fell into the strong arms of her son...

...We are seated in one of the barracks. A front-line oil-lamp is burning. Ekaterina Fyodorovna tells her son and his comrades-in-arms her terrible tale...

She spent three years as a German prisoner. The Germans had set fire to the Otritsa village in the Smolensk district and driven all the collective farmers away with them. At the slave market opened by the Germans in Shaulai, Ekaterina Fyodorovna was sold by the commandant stockbrokers to the landowner Vilke for ten marks. The landowner's wife, a German woman who had beaten the old Russian woman many a time for her "clumsiness", decided finally to

get rid of her. Ekaterina Fyodorovna, accused of disobedience to her "German masters", was sent to a labour camp. And it was here that the unexpected meeting between Rudakov and his mother took place, although the meeting was short-lived. Battle called the hero forward and the mother blessed her son and called on him and his friends to wreak sacred vengeance and to settle a bloody account with the fascist hangmen.

The guardsmen moved on ahead, to the west.

Developing their successes further, the Soviet forces harass and destroy the furiously resisting enemy. Directly after the piercing of the first line of defences the second boundary is overcome.

In these battles once again the men of the Soviet regiments have proved themselves courageous, resourceful and dauntless warriors. The hero of one battle was a volunteer in the ranks of the Red Army, the Altai hunter, Sidor Bobrov.

The old hunter from the Altai mountains who could kill a squirrel with one sure hit and who had more than once engaged in hand-to-hand fighting with bears, now applied all his hunter's training fighting the murderers of his only son who had fallen in battle.

During the defence Sidor Bobrov killed eighty-five German men and officers from his sniper's ambush. Now, during the offensive, his sure aim has brought down enemy observers, machine-gunners and officers.

Having fought their way deep inside the enemy defences, the company to which the sniper belonged lost its commander. When Bobrov saw the officer smitten down by a shell splinter, he rose from the ground and his loud and powerful voice rang over the field of battle:

"Listen to my command! Forward, against the German scum!"

And Bobrov flung himself towards the German trenches followed by his comrades-in-arms. Russians can never be overcome in hand-to-hand fighting; the Germans have learned that long ago. Having hurled the Hitlerites out of the trenches, the soldiers, led by Bobrov, stormed their way ahead and captured an enemy artillery battery.

In an attempt to halt the onward rush of the Baltic fighters, the German command brought up fresh tank units and threw them into the battle. German infantry supported by artillery, mortars and tanks launched fifteen counter-attacks in one day on this sector. But these desperate counter-attacks were of no avail. Our forces, smashing the resistance of the enemy, move steadily forward.

The offensive continues.

PAVEL KUZNETSOV

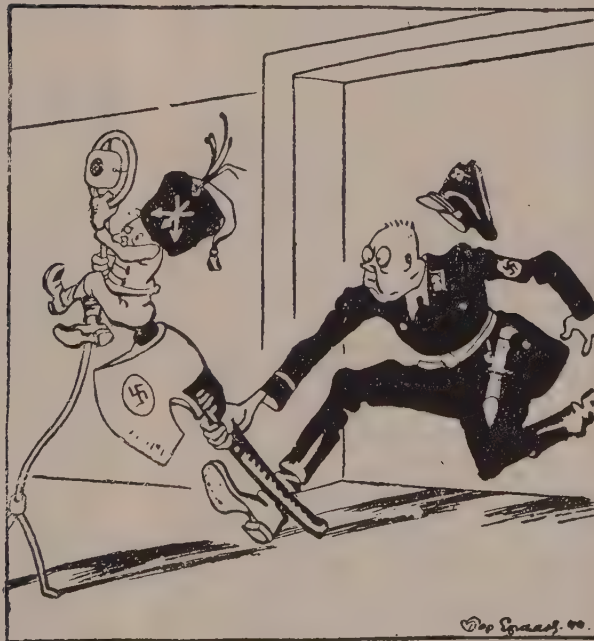
October 9th, 1944



The next course.

Drawing by Vassili Fomichov

"First Aid" from Berlin



Drawing by Boris Yefimov

Dep. Squash. 90.

FOR ABOUT BY CHILDREN

DMITRI NAGISHKIN

JYABZHA

It all happened long, long ago. So long ago that the very oldest people cannot remember it. Their fathers tell them what they heard from their own grandfathers. And the grandfathers heard it from their own fathers. It was a very long time ago.

There was an Ude called Kile whose wife died. She died and left him a daughter. Quite a little girl. Her name was Jyabzha.

Kile buried his wife. He mourned and he grieved, and then he married a second time. He took a woman from the Puninka tribe. And they lived together, the three of them—Kile, Puninka and Jyabzha.

Kile very much wanted a son, but that did not prevent him from being very fond of his daughter. He made her all kinds of toys, the sort that girls play with—a cradle, all kinds of birch-bark vessels and a pestle and mortar, so that Jyabzha should learn women's work. But the little girl asked her father:

"Make me little sledges and a spear."

"What do you want with boys' toys?" said Puninka, when she heard this. But Jyabzha replied:

"I want to go hunting with Father, instead of a son."

"A fine thing, indeed!" said Puninka. "That's not for you."

But Kile was pleased with his daughter's wish. He began making the toys for Jyabzha—little sledges he made, a bow, a spear, a little reindeer and sledge dogs.

Puninka saw that Kile paid no heed to her, and she began to hate Jyabzha. She would ill-treat the girl when her father was away hunting. But Jyabzha never complained to Kile, because she did not want to trouble him.

Then misfortune overtook Kile. One day he went hunting in the taiga. He was pursuing a wild boar, and had almost come up with it, when it disappeared into a thicket and took cover there. A striped tiger came gliding past. And the tiger was hungry. It sprang on the exhausted boar and began tearing it to pieces. But Kile, without looking to see what was stirring in the thicket, hurled in his spear. It passed through the boar and wounded the tiger. Then in its anger the great beast turned to rend the hunter. Kile pleaded with it to let him go, because he had wounded it accidentally. But the tiger paid no heed and tore the hunter to pieces.

All the other Udegei hunters went to and fro along the path the tiger used to tread, and begged and pleaded with him

to touch nobody else, and not to be angry with the clumsy hunter. But the tiger had already learned the taste of blood and paid no heed to their prayers. He began coming to the camp, taking now a dog, now a reindeer or a pig. At last he began carrying off little children. Then the old men decided to break camp.

After Kile's death, Puninka treated Jyabzha worse than ever. She gave the girl more work than a grown woman could have done. Jyabzha fetched the water, washed grain for the porridge, cooked the dinner, salted the fish, dried the salmon, dressed the skins, embroidered dresses for her stepmother and carried in brushwood from the taiga. And the stepmother did nothing at all, but lay all day long on the bench by the stove, smoking her pipe, sleeping and eating.

Jyabzha did everything that Puninka told her, because she knew that she must respect her elders. Her life was a hard one, but Jyabzha never complained.

"When I grow up," she said to herself, "I shall be a hunter, I shall live alone!"

She never parted with her spear, because her father had made it for her. And the girl had loved her father dearly. Wherever she went, she took the spear with her.

One day the stepmother sent Jyabzha into the taiga to gather birch-bark for vessels.

Jyabzha sought out a good birch, made two incisions and began to strip off the bark. Suddenly a voice asked her:

"Who are you?"

Jyabzha turned round and saw the tiger. He was very hungry, his sides were quite hollow. And he was very angry. Jyabzha said that she was the daughter of Kile the hunter. The tiger licked his lips, and said:

"Him I ate. And now I shall eat you!"

But the girl had no fear of the tiger; she shouted at him:

"Get out of here, you thief!"

The tiger sprang at Jyabzha, but the girl dodged behind the birch which she had been stripping, while the tiger crashed full tilt against it and bruised his forehead.

"Get out of here, you thief!" the girl shouted again. "Or else it will be the worse for you!"

The tiger laughed and sprang again—and got caught between two birch trunks. And there he stuck. However much he struggled, he could not wrench himself

out of the trap. The birches had him tight. Then Jyabzha took her spear and hurled it at the tiger. The spear went into one of his eyes and came out at the other, so that the tiger was blinded and died. Then Jyabzha went back to the camp.

The Udes were fastening up their belongings in packs and taking down the tents. They intended to wander to some other place, fearing to remain because of the tiger. Then Jyabzha told the old men:

"Where are you going? The tiger will not come here again!"

"How do you know that, girl?" asked the very oldest one. "Where the tiger has come once, he will come again. We shall not all escape death."

Then Jyabzha went into the taiga, to the place where the tiger hung, caught between the two birches. Jyabzha cut off his striped tail, brought it to the camp and showed it to the old men.

"Here is the tiger's tail which I have cut off. I tell you that he will not come again."

All the Udes were seized with a great fear.

"What have you done, girl?" they cried. "You must never kill a tiger. Now his spirit will walk among us and strangle us during the night. The taiga will enter our camp, the grass will grow on the paths and the swamp will cover the place."

But Jyabzha smiled and said:

"I know the hunters' law. Twice I asked the tiger to go away. But he did not obey."

"That, then, is another matter. The tiger himself is to blame!" the old men decided. They did not break camp, and everybody praised Jyabzha.

But now the girl's stepmother, Puninka, was filled with hatred and malice against Jyabzha. Whatever the girl did, she could not please her. Jyabzha would wash the grain and begin to make the porridge, then Puninka would come and throw it out, and make the girl wash more grain. She embroidered a dress, but again it did not please her stepmother.

"What kind of thing is that, clumsy?" she said. "Do you call that embroidery? Unpick it all and do it over again, make it beautiful and bright and rich."

Jyabzha worked and worked on the dress, but whatever she did, she could not satisfy her stepmother; Puninka only scolded her and screamed at her. Then the girl went to the river bank, sat down and wept. Suddenly the fern bowed its fronds over her and asked:

"Why are you weeping?"

Jyabzha told it. Then the fern stroked her face with its fronds and said:

"Do not weep, little one! This trouble can be mended. Lie down and sleep. Do not worry, we shall help you."

Then all the flowers and grasses came to the dress and laid themselves down upon it, in curls and flourishes. And there was such a wonderful pattern as had never been seen. The fern collected all the tears the girl had shed and sprinkled

them over the dress and the whole pattern remained fixed there.

When the women at the camp saw the dress all of them opened their mouths and could not shut them until the old men came and did it for them, they were so amazed. Never had anybody had such a dress. But Puninka was still more angry with the girl.

"I want a dress sewn with reindeer wool," she said.

It was summer, when the reindeer's coat is short. Where was she to find the wool? Jyabzha asked everywhere in the camp but nobody had any long reindeer wool.

Jyabzha came back home and again wept bitterly. She began to turn over her toys and remember her father, and her tears flowed faster and faster. Suddenly the toy reindeer which Jyabzha's father had made spoke to the girl.

"Don't weep, mistress," it said. "This trouble can be mended."

The reindeer shook itself, stamped with its little hoofs, and began to grow and grow until it was quite big, and covered with thick white winter wool. Then it threw off the wool and became small again.

Jyabzha made the dress for her stepmother. All her hands were sore with it. But still Puninka was not pleased with it.

"It's not you who made it!" she said. "An evil spirit is helping you. I'll make a dress for myself, and then you'll see the way to work. Go to the camp on the Anyui river. My grandmother lives there, ask her for my needle. And see that you're back by morning!"

But it was a long, long way to the camp on the Anyui river, several days' journey.

Jyabzha went away, sat down by her toys and felt very miserable. Then she heard a voice:

"Don't be sad, little mistress! What are we here for?"

Jyabzha looked around her. And there before her a dog team was standing, twelve of them, each one finer than the other, their bushy tails waving and the little paws stamping. They had white coats and yellow eyes, and their noses shone black. Jyabzha stared in amazement.

"Where have you come from?" she asked the dogs. And they replied:

"Don't you know us, Jyabzha? Kile made us."

Jyabzha looked round and saw that there were no toy dogs. They had come to life and were standing there before her. Jyabzha harnessed them and off they went at top speed. Straight forward they raced, through forests and over rivers. Forests or rivers no longer mattered: they swept right on. The girl shut her eyes tight, and the dogs rose right up into the clouds. Jyabzha opened her eyes and everything around her was light, with fleecy clouds everywhere like soft snow. Then Jyabzha took up the pole and began to drive.

"Takh-takhi!" she shouted. "Pot-pot-pot!" Flakes of cloud flew from under the dogs' feet. Jyabzha had no time to feel cold or tired before they were at the Anyui camp.

Then Jyabzha climbed out of the sledge and went to look for Puninka's grandmother. She found her lying there ill, uncombed and unwashed. Jyabzha was sorry for the old woman, she washed her, combed her hair, found some jen cheng root and gave it to her. The old woman ate it and began to recover.

"Why have you come here to me?" she asked.

"Your granddaughter sent me for her needle!"

The old grandmother looked at the girl, then got out the needle.

"You are a good girl," she said. "You have been kind to me! Here is the needle. Only see that when you give it to her, you keep the eye towards yourself and the sharp end towards Puninka."

The sun had barely risen over the sea when Jyabzha returned home with her dogs. Her stepmother was sitting there as angry as could be.

"Well," she said. "And where is my needle?"

"Here it is," replied Jyabzha. "Here is your needle!" She went to Puninka to give her the needle, but then she remembered the old grandmother's warning, and turned it with the eye towards herself and the sharp end towards her stepmother.

Barely had Puninka touched the needle when it suddenly pierced through all her fingers. However she tried and struggled, she could not free the fingers from each other.

"Well, girl, you've been too cunning for me!"

Then she guessed who had been helping Jyabzha. She waited until the girl was asleep, lighted a fire on the hearth and threw in all the toys that Jyabzha's father had made. She threw in the reindeer and the sledges and the dogs; and they all began to burn. But one of the dogs jumped out of the fire and dashed to Jyabzha. He scratched at her with his paws and wakened her.

"We must run away, Jyabzha! Your stepmother wants to kill us all!"

Then Jyabzha ran out of the hut and the dog after her.

"Where shall we go?" asked the girl.

"Anywhere, away from the stepmother!" answered the dog.

Puninka dashed out of the hut too and ran after the girl.

At that moment the moon came out and sent a beam down to the river. Jyabzha and the dog ran along it as though it were an ice track. And the stepmother followed them. But the path crumbled under her and she fell to the ground. Then she seized the little spear which Jyabzha had forgotten and left behind her, the spear which Kile had made for her. She cast the spear after Jyabzha. And it flew to Kile's daughter saying:

"Farewell, little girl! The time has come for us to part!"

Then the spear turned back and flew to the stepmother. It entered one of her eyes and came out by the other. And Puninka's eyes became as big as saucers; she flapped her arms and they turned into wings. Long claws grew on her feet. The stepmother had become a round-eyed owl. She wanted to return to her hut but her wings carried her over the taiga. And there she sat on a tree and kept crying: "Pu-nin-kal! Pu-nin-kal!" so as not to forget her own name. And that is what the owls cry to this very day.

But Jyabzha and the dog ran along the moonbeam until they ran right to the moon. The girl wanted to go back, but it began to get light and the moonbeam disappeared. So the little girl and the dog stayed there on the moon, and you can see them there to this day.

When dawn is near Jyabzha comes down to the earth to look for her spear. She goes into all the huts and looks at everything. She lights up the weapons to see if the hunter Kile's spear is not among them. And if she sees a child asleep with tears in its eyes, Jyabzha wipes them away and sends it a sweet dream.

But when the owl in the taiga cries: "Pu-nin-kal! Pu-nin-kal!" then Jyabzha hastens swiftly back again.

And you can see her if you open your eyes quickly as soon as the moonlight touches them.

Translated by Eve Manning

CONSTANTINE PAUSTOVSKY

THE LITTLE COWHERD

The dew was cold and heavy as only September dew can be. It splashed against my face from the tall grass and dropped from the trees into the river where its circles spread out lazily in the dark water.

I was wet through and started a bonfire on the bank. The smoke curled upwards to the sky, into the upper branches of the larches and fir-trees. The larches had already lost their needles. These fine needles resembling short golden hair fell

steadily downwards although there was no wind. A bird chattered on the larch near the bonfire and it seemed to me that the bird was the local forest barber, cutting the needles, rattling its scissors and pouring these needles down on my head, into the river and the bonfire.

As I dried myself near the fire I gazed at the river. Yellow leaves floated in bunches, catching on obstacles and stopping. Behind them came other islands of leaves. They covered the river, then began slowly

to turn round, break away from the clutches of the obstacle and finally free themselves and float away, now flaring up like gold when the sun fell on them, now dying down and darkening as they came into the shadow made by the riverside bushes.

The river bore traces of the battle with the Germans: abandoned means of transport such as rafts overgrown with willowherbs and alder and logs stuck in the sand-banks. Round them the cool, clear water foamed.

The bushes near the bonfire rustled and the wet head of a cow appeared. The cow sniffed the air, sighed noisily and nodded its white head, with black-spotted forehead, at me. At that minute a whip cracked somewhere like a shot and somebody shouted:

"Where you off to, Paraska? Where d'you think you're going, you old plague?"

Paraska dashed off at a gallop and breaking through the bushes disappeared. Out of the bushes appeared a little cowherd, an ordinary cowherd, the kind you can see in everyone of our villages, small, fair-haired, with a big cap, a torn padded cotton jacket and a long whip. He dragged the whip behind him along the wet grass.

The cowherd wiped his nose on the edge of his sleeve that hung to the very ground, looked at me and said in a husky voice:

"Hello! Terrible this dew. Isn't it? It's getting me down!"

"Come and dry yourself here!" I offered.

"Not a bad idea that," the cowherd agreed and coming up sat down on his haunches next to the fire. "Who are you, a traveller?"

"More or less," I answered.

"And I am a cowherd," said the boy. "Alexei Kudyshkin. I'm working in my father's place. He's at the front. To tell you the truth, I tried to get in as a stableboy, but the chairman of the collective farm wouldn't take me. He says I'm too small. Chose Lyonka. As if Lyonka's any good as a stableboy! I could lay him out with one punch if I wanted. He's tall but weak as a baby. 'Cause a man's strength's usually in his shoulders and his shoulders are as narrow as a goat's."

The boy kept quiet for a while, then suddenly asked:

"Have you ever seen the Mississippi river? In America?"

"No, I haven't. Why?"

"I've a hankering to see it. I'm told it's wide, bigger than the Volga. And have you ever been to Stalingrad?"

"I have."

The boy smiled.

"My dad was wounded in Stalingrad and got a medal for its defence. He was the cowherd in our village until the war."

"Where did you hear about the Mississippi?" I asked.

"In school. And from dad. He knew everything, every blade of grass. What it's called, where it grows and what good or harm it does. He would explain every-

thing. About our country and about other countries. Is it true that there are mountains of diamonds so deep in the earth that to get to them you have to dig for a hundred years with machines?"

"Don't know," I answered. "I don't seem to have heard about such mountains."

"But my dad did," said the boy. "He's not a traveller, but he knew everything about travels. And do you know about the bottles?"

"Which bottles?"

"Postage bottles."

"No, I don't."

"Well, I'll tell you," said the boy. "Here's a traveller sailing a ship. Over a great ocean. The sailors, of course, mutiny. They don't want to sail the seas. At home they have good food, the stove keeps going all winter, they have their own cow and garden and in the evenings they can saunter over to see their neighbours, have a smoke and play at draughts. And here there's only heat and water—and nothing else. So they mutiny and put the traveller in a canoe and set him afloat all alone in the ocean. And they themselves turn and go back. And the traveller's canoe gets cast ashore on a desert island. Have you ever seen a desert island?"

"No," I answered.

"We've got such islands on our river," said the boy. His eyes were shining and his face was ruddy with excitement. "There's even an otter living on one of them... So a wave casts him onto a desert island. On this island the only sounds are palm trees rustling and parrots flying and chattering, and he's lucky if he finds any fresh water at all. So he gets a bottle out of the canoe, writes a note saying that he's been cast up on this island, stops up the bottle and flings it into the sea. The tide carries it along, then, of course, it's picked up by the crew of some ship, which sends out a radio message that this traveller needs immediate help. And he's saved. And the sailors afterwards are tried by a court of the admiralty."

"For mutinying?"

"For mutinying. And for inhumanity."

"Alyoshka!" a woman's angry voice rang out in the distance. "Where have you got to? Paraska's got into the cabbage-patch."

"Here I am!" shouted the cowherd. "I'll chase her out right away."

He got up, wrapped his jacket round him.

"What a pest!" he said. "The whole herd taken together's less trouble than Paraska. Well, good-bye!"

He ran towards the bushes. In the distance I could hear the snapping of his whip and his cries: "Where are you going, you devil!" and the discontented mooing of the cow.

I put out the fire and walked downstream. With every step I took the river seemed more mysterious and picturesque. Now a group of aspen trees would loom up against the steep banks like a shimmering silver wall with the yellow hop hanging from some of the trees looking like new

matings hung out to dry in the sun. Now I would come across a hollow willow branch, lying across the river like a bridge and around it chubs leaping out of the water. Now the river would wind triumphantly into a forest—autumn blue or gold. Near the banks the water would rush over the washed sand or stand in quiet deep pools. Around the pools' edges I could vaguely glimpse the sea oak-wood lying at the bottom. Once I came on a slope red with maples and in the thicket of maples I saw a little old chapel with a rusty cupola.

At sunset I came out on the country road. It wound along the bank. Once again I could see on the river rafts overgrown with grass. At a distance they looked like islands. The sun was setting and something on one of the rafts shone blindingly, like a ragged star. I peered at it but couldn't make out what was shining—a tin can or a piece of glass.

I carefully made my way to the raft on an overturned log, bent down and saw an ordinary beer bottle. A bindweed was wound around its neck several times. I picked up the bottle and looked at it against the light. It was sealed with wax and there was something white inside. It was a letter folded in the form of a triangle.

I broke off the top and pulled out the letter, but couldn't read it for the handwriting was very faint and dusk was coming on so quickly that it was impossible to make out the uneven lines. I had to hurry to get to the railway before complete darkness set in.

I put away the letter and went along the road to the station. From the dark thickets came the cold intoxicating odour of leaves. In the fields the hazy light was fading and high in the heavens the last blood-red flame was dying away in the clouds.

The train for Moscow came at night. After the deserted fields, the cold air and the solitude, the smoky noisy cars seemed particularly comfortable. I climbed up on an upper berth near a light, got out the letter and read it. It was old. Judging from the date, written for some reason in specially big handwriting, it had lain in the bottle for nearly two years.

"Dear dad! This is a letter for you from your son Alexei Kudyshkin. While you fight at the front and defend our country we are getting along all right, waiting for your victorious return. Mum works as a cowherd and I help her, but I want to be a stableboy. Because when you watch the cows you see nothing but cows and

not much else. On a horse you can ride wherever you like but the cows take only one old path to Gorely meadows or to Mitin Grove. There's nothing much to be seen there. And I want to see everything and know everything. I'd float to you in Stalingrad on a raft but mum wouldn't let me and I'm told one needs a pass to get to the front anyway. I wish you would take me along to hand you cartridges or do something else in the military line for you. I'd manage. And maybe you wouldn't want to but in the end you'd tell me some interesting things anyway, if things were very quiet and there was a break in the fighting. I'm sending this letter in a bottle, like a traveller, 'cause it's not interesting to send it by mail. Our river flows into the Volga and the bottle is sure to get to you along the Volga. Some soldier will find it, read the address and deliver it to you, unless the bottle is sunk by a mine or a ship smashes it with its wheel. The boys say that Stalingrad is forty-eight kilometres long and that there's fighting along every inch! And another reason I'm sending this letter in a bottle is so's mum won't read it, and she sometimes cries about you and doesn't like it a bit when I or grandma see her tears. You'd better know that. We're waiting for you to come back hale and hearty and think about you every day. And that's why I remain for ever your loving son Alexei.

"Petka, the miller's son, is a pilot already. They say he flew over our village and waved his wings but I didn't see. In the pool near the oak stump there's so many ices it's something terrible. You can hear them splashing night and day. And a half-witted fox stole grandfather Potap the hunter's duck scarecrow right out of the trap in the middle of the night—it made a mistake. Grandpa swore for two days. Send me an answer."

In Moscow I couldn't make up my mind what to do with the letter. Alexei's father's address had certainly changed since that time. I had to fall back on a few white lies so as not to hurt Alyosha and send the letter to him in the village with the postscript that the bottle containing this letter had been noticed in the Caspian sea, picked up by the crew of the "Krasnovodsk" and was being returned to the sender since military operations at Stalingrad had long since ended in a brilliant victory, and the addressee had undoubtedly gone on to further victories in the west.

Translated by Jennie Karassik

AT THE ROUND TABLE UNDER THE CUCKOO CLOCK

The fourteenth number of the "Our Guests" series of broadcasts was given on November 7th instead of the usual first Sunday in the month, since this date marked the twenty-seventh anniversary of

the October Revolution. On this national holiday we desired to spend an hour with our friends at the Round Table under the Cuckoo Clock. And at the appointed time our chimes rang out and the familiar call

of the Cuckoo resounded throughout the decorated and festive streets and squares. Inviting the guests to take their places at the Round Table, I congratulated them and our listeners on the occasion of the holiday, with special greetings to our men at the front, from whom we have received many comments on previous broadcasts. Many of these gallant men are now fighting far from their homes, in the mountains of Yugoslavia, the fjords of Norway, on the banks of the Vistula, Danube and Tissa, or on Prussian soil. All have sent us their greetings from these distant parts.

The first of our guests to speak was Hero of the Soviet Union, Guards Captain Kryukov, of the Soviet air force. This twenty-two-year-old airman has already dispatched sixteen German planes. In the grim days when the fascists were at the gates of the Soviet capital, Kryukov and his comrades patrolled the Moscow skies. On the memorable day in 1941 when Stalin, despite the siege, reviewed the military parade on the Red Square and reported on the occasion of the twenty-fourth anniversary of the October Revolution, Kryukov and three of his companions gave battle to sixteen Messerschmitts, dispersing them and, keeping them from Moscow where Stalin's confident and cheerful voice was heard. It was this battle that our valiant guest described at the Round Table.

His talk was followed by young singers and musicians of the Moscow House of Pioneers, who sang several Russian and Ukrainian folk songs, followed by a dashing Cossack dance.

The next to speak was Captain Leonid Sobolev, popular Soviet writer and the author of many sea stories. Sobolev was fairly swamped with questions about young naval heroes. He told the Round Table gathering about a little orphan boy whom the men of one of the Sevastopol naval batteries had taken under their wing. When an enemy attack was being repulsed this boy fought by the side of the sailors, and then wept bitterly and could not be consoled because he had spoiled his Tommy-gun in battle.

Another guest at the Round Table was the famous composer Dmitri Shostakovich who expressed the idea that music today acquired fresh force and import. This, he

said, was because the songs, and music in general, can today reach the most remote corners of Soviet land, from which the Red Army has dislodged the enemy. Then Shostakovich played his graceful and vivacious "Polka" and, accompanied by the Beethoven State Quartette, performed the scherzo from his well-known piano quintette.

Next at the microphone was Nadezhda Chubenko, a young soloist of the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre who recently made a very successful debut as Liza in Chaikovsky's opera "Queen of Spades." Chubenko sang a Chaikovsky romance and her favourite Ukrainian song. Then, at the request of the guests, she told us something about herself. Only recently she had been a member of a collective farm in the Ukrainian village of Smorodkovka. A commission from Moscow arrived in her village to test the voices of the members of the amateur singing group and were impressed by the unusually strong, pure, fresh voice of the young peasant girl. Chubenko was thereupon invited to study and work at the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre. Here she was given every attention and studied under some of the leading singers. Today Nadezhda Chubenko sings the most difficult roles magnificently.

The Round Table gathering concluded with an amusing performance by the popular clown, satirist and circus artist, Vitali Lazarenko. His father, Vitali Lazarenko Senior, was a famous circus performer and in the years of the Revolution, bore the proud title of "Master of their Majesty, the People." The son, who inherited the title and fame of his father, related how, one November 7th, Lazarenko Senior had passed through the Red Square with a column of demonstrators and perched on seven-metre stilts had greeted Stalin from this lofty position. Vitali Lazarenko Jr., in the circus arena, can jump across two cars side by side or over ten horses. He also plays difficult musical selections on the xylophone or accordion swinging from a ladder. This circus artist concluded his appearance at the microphone with these musical selections, couplets and a jumping performance.

LEV KASSIL,

Chairman of the Round Table

BOOKS AND WRITERS

NIKOLAI NEKRASOV

Nekrasov was born on December 4th, 1821. His childhood was spent beside the Volga, on his father's estate near Yaroslavl. His father, a churlish and ignorant landowner, could not exercise a good influence on his son; it was his mother who awakened in his heart the first stirrings of love for the people.

His father, hostile towards his son's dream of entering the university, refused him the necessary money. Nekrasov, however, who from childhood had always persisted in attaining what he had set his heart on, did not allow this to stop him from starting out for St. Petersburg at the age of seventeen. But complete lack of means denied him the possibility of preparing for the entrance examinations, and he was forced to continue his education as best he might.

Thrown thus early on his own resources, the future poet proved himself an indefatigable worker. The failure of his first book ("Dreams and Melodies") not only did not discourage him, but seemed to spur him to greater effort.

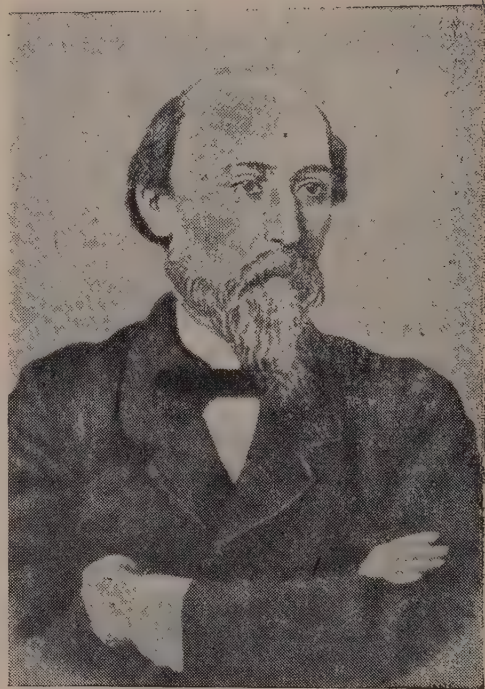
The young Nekrasov tried his hand at a variety of literary styles. He wrote vaudevilles for the Alexandrinsky theatre; published many sketches, stories and tales in the magazines and often appeared as critic and journalist.

Recalling his life as a young man, just before his death, Nekrasov said to his friends: "It's incomprehensible how I managed to get through so much..."

In 1843 Nekrasov began, but never finished a long autobiographical novel, "The Life and Adventures of Tikhon Trosnikov". At this time he was an intimate friend of the great critic Belinsky, who was largely responsible for his joining the progressive movement of Russian society.

By persevering work Nekrasov won himself a place in the literary world. At the age of twenty-five he was already a well-known publisher in St. Petersburg. The publication of the "St. Petersburg Symposium", in which, incidentally, Dostoyevsky's "Poor Folk" appeared, brought Nekrasov considerable renown.

In 1847 Nekrasov and Belinsky ran the important journal "The Contemporary," calling for democratic reform, and hostile to the autocratic regime. All Nekrasov's unflinching will and devotion, to the cause of freedom were needed to issue such a journal during those years of reaction, which tightened its grip still more firmly after the failure of the 1848 French revolution. The influence of "The Contemporary" grew, becoming especially powerful after leaders of the revolutionary-democratic movement, the philosopher and writer



Nikolai Chernyshevsky and the critic Nikolai Dobrolyubov, began to contribute to it. It was during these years that Nekrasov became prominent as a poet. Such works as "Poet and Citizen" (1856), "Meditations at the Front Entrance" (1858), "Peasant Children" (1861), "The Pedlars" (1861), "Arina, the Soldier's Mother" (1863), "Jack Frost with the Red Nose" (1863), "The Railway" (1864) were enormously popular. The disputes raging around Nekrasov reflected the ideological struggle of that time, a struggle in which Nekrasov's poetry became a mighty clarion voicing popular protest and presenting an object of hatred to the reactionaries and philistine liberals.

In 1868 the government banned "The Contemporary" but Nekrasov did not lay down his arms. Very soon we find him directing another remarkable XIX century Russian journal—"The Home Chronicle." Nekrasov's co-editor on this journal was the famous writer and satirist, Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin.

In "The Home Chronicle" Nekrasov published his long poems, "Russian Women" which portrayed the wives of the Decembrists, who courageously shared the fate of the organizers of the revolt against Nikolai I and who were exiled to Siberia.

This journal also printed Nekrasov's "Who Lives Well in Russia," a poem which could be called an epic of the life of the Russian peasantry of that time.

In the spring of 1875, Nekrasov's health failed. His complaint (cancer of the rectum) proved incurable and in December 1877, he died.

Not long before his death Nekrasov received a message full of extraordinary warmth of feeling. It was from Nikolai Chernyshevsky, his old comrade-in-arms, then languishing in exile far away, who wrote in a letter to his cousin: "If, when you receive my letter, Nekrasov is still with us, tell him that I love him dearly as a person, that I thank him for his friendly feelings towards me, that I embrace him, firmly convinced that his fame will never die, that Russia's love for him will be eternal, as for the most gifted and noble of all Russian poets. I weep bitterly for him. He was indeed a man of great nobility of soul, of great understanding."

Chernyshevsky was not alone in his high estimation of Nekrasov and his poetry. In an address written by the St. Petersburg students and presented about the same time to the sick Nekrasov by a special delegation, we find expressions no less cordial:

"When we repeat the names dear to us," wrote the students, "your name will not be forgotten, and we will hand it on to the people so that they should know who it was who scattered so many good seeds on the soil of their happiness."

In addition to prominent representatives of science, art and literature, a numerous and solidly-united body of young people took part in Nekrasov's funeral. It was they who formed a cordon around the funeral procession, they who laid on the poet's grave a wreath inscribed: "To Nekrasov, from the Socialists." Among these young people was Plekhanov, later one of the leaders and theoreticians of Russian social-democracy.

What was the secret of this extraordinary love for Nekrasov on the part of people of the calibre of Chernyshevsky, the acknowledged leader and spiritual ruler of the Russian intelligentsia?

This can be explained to some extent by the influence of Nekrasov's exceptional talent as an artist, and the wealth of spirit and thought in his poetry. The "new people" of those times—champions of the people, of the peasant revolution, freedom-loving Russian youth, were enthralled by his stern and beautiful, bold and entrancing muse, which the poet himself called a "muse of vengeance and sorrow."

Nekrasov's hero is the Russian people and Russia in all her manifold aspects. In melodious but unrelenting verse is sung the true story of the Russian freedom-loving people and their enemies—despots, drawing-room hypocrites and doltish merchants; the free spirit of the people, unbroken by despotism or obscurantism. Even the landscape of his native land Nekrasov sees not only with the eyes of a poet, but also with the eyes of the bond serf for

whom the earth is both mother and step-mother. In the gloomiest years, Nekrasov wrote:

Enough has it borne, our great Russian
Nation,

All will it bear, and forge ever on
Its broad, shining way!

In an age when West-European poetry often did nothing but bewail the lot of "the wretched," Nekrasov wrote works in which the hymn of human suffering is never marred by the gleam of sentimental tears, but generally full of discerning anger and courageous hope. Here is such a hymn to the future on the banks of the Volga:

Of other times and other scenes
I see the light now dawning,
Along the shores
Of my loved river;
My people freed
Of fetters grim,
My people strong, enduring.

And the Volga, the poet's "loved river" which had seen the crushing labour of the barge-haulers, this "eternal river" would ring to the voice of the "eternal, lusty working folk," who would "densely populate its now desolate shores." This belief in the spirit of his people, this knowledge gave Nekrasov the right to wage a merciless, caustic criticism of life in pre-revolutionary Russia. The Russian people "will bear" everything: the cruel blows dealt by reaction, lies, the malice and engulfing slime of a soul-poisoning philistine encirclement, all that has more than once mutilated the spirit of other peoples, but failed to break the people of Russia. So Nekrasov believed. In his poetry through and above the gloomy and tragic strains reflecting this bitter reality, there always sounds the hymn of belief, the symphony of hope inspired by Russian nature, by the spiritual greatness of her best sons.

Nekrasov's works are not only true to the spirit of the people, but are organically bound up with folk art and folklore. He wrote that his free muse "re-echoed the people's songs."

Elements of folklore are especially clearly seen in three of Nekrasov's long poems dealing with peasant life: "The Pedlars," "Jack Frost with the Red Nose" and "Who Lives Well in Russia."

His verses about the pedlar and his love resemble a folk song, and was widely known and sung by the youth.

In the poem "Who Lives Well in Russia," the subject itself was largely inspired by a well-known folk tale "Truth and Falsehood" in which some peasants, as a result of a dispute among themselves, seek a man who lives according to truth, but are unsuccessful. In Nekrasov's poem, the peasants, after arguing together, seek a man who lives happily, and also cannot find one.

When speaking about this poem it is impossible, certainly, to confine oneself to the discussion of its connection with

folklore. It is Nekrasov's greatest work, occupying in his art a place comparable with Pushkin's "Eugene Onegin" and Gogol's "Dead Souls."

One of the great Jacobins, Saint Just, said: "Happiness is an idea new to Europe." In an epoch which was one of the most difficult the people had ever experienced, Nekrasov, the great Russian singer of freedom, wrote a poem which might be paraphrased as follows: the idea of happiness will remain unrealizable till the people receive enlightenment and freedom. Neither the carefree life of the prosperous, nor the burdensome existence of the de-luded poor are compatible with the idea of real happiness:

Freedom and light
Must first be sought,
If the lot of the people
Will cease to be curst.

Nekrasov is a militant poet in the most modern sense of the term; freedom and light are to be won in the struggle against darkness and oppression. He lauds those qualities which from time immemorial have been for the people the hallmark of real fighters and heroes; bearers of lofty ideals, uncompromising, self-sacrificing. Thousands of Russians going into battle for the freedom of their homeland have repeated the famous lines of Nekrasov:

Go into battle for your country's honour,
With love and firm conviction the hated
foe assail.
Go, perish for your love without dishonour,
Your death is not in vain—the cause can't
fail,
That's guaranteed with blood—it must and
will prevail.

These are lines from a poem which was not only the civil, but also the aesthetic manifestation of Nekrasov. Art, Nekrasov wrote in this poem, serves to struggle "for the honour of the homeland;" the genius of the artist is true to the "feeling of all-embracing love."

Contemporaries are often inclined to see only the inner conflicts, the "spiritual discords" of poets. This was the case with some of Nekrasov's contemporaries. But Nekrasov's conflicts with himself arose only when some influence had weakened this sense of closeness to the people, a friendship with those who in the poet's eyes embodied the real Russia. At such times he feared to die "estranged from the people," he felt profoundly lonely; for were not the best, such as Chernyshevsky, far away in Siberia, in exile amid the snows, while he, Nekrasov, had not stood shoulder to shoulder with them in the hour of danger. It was hard to have to admit this.

Nekrasov hated, the complacent philistine with his somnolent conscience, his ignorance of all inner conflict, but still more he hated the petty-bourgeois engrossed in his trivial "doubts" and "hesitations" and using them to justify his inactivity. He wrote with indignation of those who con-

sidered that the "soil of the people" was "barren" and the seeds "poor", of those who sowed "timidly, in dribblets."

He sent forth the appeal:

Sow seeds eternal of wisdom and good,
And the Russian people in gratitude
Will thank you from their hearts.

("To the Sowers")

Reading Nekrasov we see that this faith, clarity and happiness came to him only when his mind and heart were merged in the "cherished thoughts" of the people.

Nekrasov was able to couch his poetry in quite a new form. His sources were not only folklore, or the poetry of his predecessors championing popular rights. It is a common criticism that the author of "Who Lives Well in Russia" and "The Hunt" popularized his style, introducing prosaic and special terms and making a wide and bold use of the language of middle-class townfolk. This is true, but Nekrasov's strength lay in the fact that he sought new means of expression in his realistic poetry; his talent enabled him to find a new wealth of phrase in the Russian language and to make Russian words "sing" in rhythms and combinations hitherto unknown to Russian poetry and which Nekrasov himself drew from the people.

We have in mind not only folklore, but also the "everyday" speech of the people, that rich fund of humour, passion and irony found in the speech of simple Russian folk and which Nekrasov introduced into poems, lyrical verse and epigrams.

Nekrasov's lyrics convinced even the literary snobs that his "muse of vengeance and sorrow" was able to express the subtlest nuances of the sentiments of tenderness, love of nature, youth, partings. In this, if you like, lies the poignancy of Nekrasov's lyrics. They reflect these tragic times in Russia when the lover carried away the image of his beloved into tsarist penal servitude; when the peasant girl realized all the depth of her emotion only when she must part with the youth she loved, whom the landowner had decided "to make into a soldier." They are bitter lyrics, but fraught with a tragic power truly Dantean.

The Nekrasov tradition of a militant, people's poetry lives on in contemporary Russian poetry, in the art of Soviet poets. It is perfectly justifiable to compare the poetry of Nekrasov with that of the most famous poet of the Soviet era, Mayakovsky. Nekrasov is closer to us perhaps at the present time than ever before.

We read the verse of our young poets describing the Great Patriotic War, the sufferings of Russian women, the desolation wrought by our inhuman enemy; we read poems expressing the people's faith in victory and their call for vengeance. And we cannot but remember him whose muse was the muse of the vengeance, the sorrow and the invincible spiritual might of our people.

VLADISLAV YEUGENYEV-
MAXIMOV

WRITERS AT THE FRONT

"I take up the pen whenever I can and the sword when I ought." These words of the XVI century Central-Asian poet Sultan Babur might serve as the battle slogan of all those writers who, in all countries and at all times throughout the ages, have taken up arms in response to their country's call. Soldier-poets, men whose names are carefully preserved in history. There was the Russian poet Zhukovsky who fought during the National War of 1812 in the Moscow People's Guard and who on the battlefield itself wrote his famous poem, "The Singer in the Russian Warriors' Camp." "Our men are the first to dash into battle," exclaimed the poet, words that bolstered up the Russian spirit. The written word became the poet's weapon.

It is doubtful whether at any other time in history the poet and soldier has been so completely merged into one individual as during the present war against fascism. "We are soldiers," said the poet Alexander Prokofiev. "The song that stabs, hacks and slashes has been given us as a weapon."

There are over 800 Soviet writers at the front. They are engaged on various jobs and pure literary or journalistic activity is interspersed with fighting. The writer's chief weapon, however, is the written word—a weapon put to many uses. Authors find their way into the frontline newspapers alongside the professional journalists and newspaper men. Thousands of newspapers with large circulations are issued in the Red Army. Literally every formation has its own paper which may be found amongst the countless divisional, army and field newspapers with their characteristic Red Army title: "Courage," "For the Rout of the Enemy," "The Frontliner," "The Banner of Victory," "The Soldier's Word," "The Stalinist Fighter" and many others. Many of these papers have well-known writers as permanent members of their editorial boards. Among regular contributors to the newspaper "In Defence of the Country" are Ilya Ehrenburg, Nikolai Tikhonov, Vera Inber and Alexander Prokofiev.

Such famous poets and writers as Peter Pavlenko, Alexander Bezymensky, Ilya Selvinsky, Mikhail Svetlov and the late Yuri Krymov left for the front during the early days of the war. In bringing their talent and their experience to the battle area, the writers themselves have learned a great deal from their new work. It is interesting to note that many of them have begun to adopt new styles of writing—prose writers have shown their skill as poets and dramatists, critics and poets have become feuilleton and prose writers while all of them, as a matter of course, work as journalists. Vsevolod Vishnevsky, responsible for the scenario "We of Kronstadt," formerly wrote only

prose. "If circumstances demand it," he said, "I will write in verse!"

When working in his own field, every writer seeks for those forms that have the greatest appeal under the new conditions. As an example of a successful "find" of this sort we may quote "Foma Smyslov's Words of Wisdom" created by the poet Semyon Kirsanov. Foma Smyslov is a fictitious character, the reputed author of the instructive, comic and dramatic episodes and admonitions which Kirsanov writes for the army. Foma Smyslov is an "old sweat" who has been through fire and water. His writings cover everything from satire directed against the enemy to advice on cleaning a rifle. They are written in the colloquial language peculiar to the people, a language as rhythmical as the sea waves. Foma Smyslov receives an endless stream of letters from his readers and admirers, and nobody believes that he is really the poet Kirsanov who has been pushed into the background. But it is just this that makes Kirsanov proudly realize that he has found the right word to say in wartime.

Stories told in the first person easily establish contact between poet and reader so that other poets also adopt this style in its various forms as, for example, Alexander Prokofiev in his popular "Tale of Scout Ivan Mavrin." Another literary figure popular with the army is the hero of Tvardovsky's poem, the peasant, private Vassili Tyorkin of the infantry. Chapters have been constantly added to this poem as the war progressed. First appearing in frontline newspapers, they have since been issued in book form.

Quite a number of new authors have arisen during the war—poets whose works were first published in the soldiers' newspapers issued in the trenches. Many of them have undoubted talent and their names are already popular with their readers. Junior Lieutenant Chepurov's verses "On the Volkhov" are pleasing in their concreteness and poetic clarity. A stream of lyricism runs through Lieutenant Vitali Tsybenko's "Lines of a Letter" and "Who'll Tell Me?" that is characteristic of those who live among the thunder and smoke of war. In the description of an attack by Serguei Smirnov, another frontline poet, one hears the measured tread of a march.

"The young man who wants to become a writer today must pass through the school of war," wrote Constantine Simonov when dealing with the work of young writers. Ilya Ehrenburg often reiterates this same idea: "The real books about the war are developing in the hearts of soldiers at the front. They will be written by those who are waging war, by those who today often cannot even find time to write a postcard to their relatives." Ilya Ehrenburg was the first to welcome the talented soldier-poet, Gudzenko.



Marshal Ivan Konyev with the writers Alexander Fadeyev and Mikhail Sholokhov at the front

The works of soldiers at the front are the statements of living witnesses. They describe how they go into attack and how they rest after it; of the death of their comrades, of their longings for their near and dear ones. No imagination can replace this personal experience, nothing else can create such realism and such strength of emotion. Sometimes one senses a hastiness in their output, a kind of unevenness; this, however, is work performed in the heat of battle and even these special features are dear to us since they are the direct impressions describing a situation.

From what we have written it would seem that it is mostly poems that are printed at the front, for the short poem is compact, requiring little space. This, however, does not mean an absence of prose-writers and dramatists. Short plays are written and produced at the front and some papers even print short novels in serial form. Considerable space is devoted to humour, the most popular form of literature with the soldier.

Adaptability is a decided asset to the writer at the front. He must be able to write whilst lying in the most uncomfortable positions, in dugout or trench. By the dim light of a candle or pocket torch he uses his own knee or the back of his comrade as table. Early in the war, Yuri Krymov described just this. "A few words about the work," he said. "I must admit I underestimated its difficulties. We have to work literally on the run and that's something you have to learn the knack

of. I am gradually acquiring this ability." All writers have gradually acquired it, one of the best examples being the poet Eugene Dolmatovsky who found himself in the most difficult and dangerous places.

At the beginning of the war he was reported missing and spent several months behind the enemy's lines. Later he took part in the terrific battle at Stalingrad and then fought on the Don front; together with the army he participated in the victorious offensive. Dolmatovsky is a tireless worker—a fact testified to by the orders and medals he has received. "The situation demands..."—and Dolmatovsky settles down to his story. This was the origin of his series of sketches "In the Distant Steppes" dealing with the offensive. Dolmatovsky, of course, is primarily a lyricist and since the war four books of his verses have been published: "Steppe Notebook," "Song of the Dnieper," "Poems about Stalingrad" and "Faith in Victory." Dolmatovsky is in direct contact with the army and the battlefield. He refused a short furlough offered him after many long months at the front. "I don't want to leave, I can't go," he wrote... "We are working, tremendously thrilled with our wonderful army and its personnel. This is not mere interest but a great love for these people which will last to the grave."

The love is mutual. The writer in the army is somebody you know, somebody you can ask for advice, learn from and teach. The army impatiently awaits every new book. How effective an author's words

are at the front may be judged from the following: Vera Inber's poem "Pulkovo Meridian," which she wrote during the worst days of the siege of Leningrad, contains a verse describing the death of her year-old grandson. This short excerpt expresses the whole sorrow felt at the death of all the children who perished in the war. Shortly after the poem was published Vera Inber received a letter from a Red Army man. "I pondered on how a citizen of the Soviet Union could effectively answer your poem describing the death of your grandson," he wrote. "This is what I did: I adopted a tiny four-year-old mite who had lost his parents in Leningrad."

The words of the writer strengthen the feelings of unity amongst Soviet people—that unity which Vsevolod Vishnevsky, speaking at a meeting of writers, called "the feeling of a single family." We recall also the emotions seizing Yuri Krymov during his first days at the front. Here is what he wrote about the Red Army: "It is beautiful in the finest sense of that word. It is beautiful in its humanity, its will to victory, its indomitable, modest fearlessness. Much of what I heard about our army before seemed mere propaganda exaggerations but now I know that it is true. The men are prepared to sacrifice their lives for their country, any hour, any moment."

These meetings and the consciousness of this feeling of brotherhood amongst Soviet people have produced a new quality in the works of Soviet writers since war began. The writers' art became strengthened and enhanced. They have observed their people during difficult days of wartime routine and in the dangers of battle. They have obtained a profounder knowledge of the spiritual qualities of the people—their modesty, strength and loyalty. This helped them to create works of great value. In this connection we note Vassili Grossman's "The People Is Immortal," written during the early months of the war, his novel "Life" and his cycle of Stalingrad sketches.

The same applies to Simonov's novel, "Days and Nights", also dealing with the Stalingrad epic. Since war began, Simonov has developed talents as a most versatile and voluminous writer. There is hardly a literary style he has not used—prose, poetry, drama and journalism; nor is there a single corner of the front which he has not visited. Three books of sketches, "From the Barents to the Black Sea," will find a permanent place in literature.

The death, in 1942, of the well-known writer Eugene Petrov, co-author with Ilya Ilf in "Diamonds to Sit On," "The Golden Calf" and "Little Golden America," cut short his creative output as a war correspondent on the many fronts. He left behind him an interesting diary of front life. The war stories of Pavlenko, Kozhevnikov, Safronov, the poems of the young Byelorussian poet, Arkadi Kuleshov, the poems and stories of the Ukrainian poet, Leonid Pervomaisky—these are all

valuable contributions to wartime literature. These writers obtained their copy straight from the battlefield or in the villages and woods where partisans were active; they observed the growth and changes which took place in human psychology under the influence of war.

"Naval Officer" is the title of an interesting play by Yuri Kron. Attached to a submarine, he studied his material on the spot and succeeded in noting and recording how the Soviet type of officer was developed, how the courageous, instinctive integrity of character arose in him.

The war lyrics will be read for many years to come. That written often in the heat of battle and destined to live for a day has already stood the test of time. Published in book form they have proved real poems indeed. Simonov's famous verse "Wait for Me," cut out of newspapers or copied by hand were carried in the haversack of literally every soldier. Who better than a frontliner can understand that longing for the loved one, that great desire to see her again? "Wait for Me" found hundreds of imitators—a new lyrical theme had been discovered.

Courageous lyricism is particularly prominent in the works of Alexei Surkov. As "The Tramp at the Front, the Scout"—for so he dubs himself—he has a splendid knowledge of the soldier's spirit and of everyday life at the front. His "Three Notebooks," a recent collection of Surkov's works, reads like a diary.

Many of the above-mentioned works were published in the national newspapers. About eighty of the leading Soviet writers are the permanent war correspondents of such papers as "Pravda," "Izvestia," "Red Star," "Komsomolskaya Pravda" and "Trud." Since the beginning of the war they have been describing day-to-day events; undoubtedly their writings will serve as a basis for the future history of the war.

When speaking of soldier-writers in the full meaning of the word, we include very many. Orders and medals have been awarded to 250 members of the Union of Soviet writers—the Order of the National War, first and second class, the Order of the Red Banner, the Order of the Red Star, and medals for the defence of the heroic cities of Stalingrad, Leningrad, Sevastopol, Odessa, and Moscow. Numerous writers have also been awarded the partisan medal.

Although several hundred authors are regular soldiers or officers there are also many writers engaged solely on their professional duties in the army who take up arms at necessary moments and display great courage and resourcefulness. Take, for instance, the quiet kind-hearted Mikhail Gershenson, the author of stories for the youth. He was working in the army as interpreter and correspondent, but when the company commander was killed, he led it into the attack. He displayed exceptional bravery and decisiveness through-

out, upholding the fighting spirit of the company. He, himself, died later from a stomach wound caused by an explosive bullet.

Arkadi Gaidar, the writer of children's stories, is a figure that will always be remembered. He was the author of "Timur and His Gang," a story which depicts the positive characteristics of Soviet children such as their sense of duty, nobility, courage, resourcefulness, and love for their country and its defenders. By his personal example he showed the meaning of fearlessness and loyal service to the country. The story of his activity in a partisan column would in itself make an interesting novel, having unfortunately a sad ending, however.

Gaidar remained in the Ukraine, near Kiev, after that city had been occupied by the Germans in 1941. Letters received later from the colonel in whose unit he served showed that Gaidar refused to leave by air with the Red Army Staff and remained as a partisan in the Dnieper woods.

"They did a lot of damage to the Germans, those fighters," stated a letter written to the Writers' Union by Anna Shvaiko, native of the locality in which Gaidar was active. Her husband was shot for connections with the partisans and her sons were driven off to work in Germany. "I remember when Gaidar spoke in the village of Ozerishche. Under the very noses of the Germans and their police he called on the people to struggle against the accursed fascists who came uninvited to our country. On several occasions my little son went to the village with Gaidar to get straw or such-like."

A search was soon begun and about a month later Gaidar was captured and killed when on a sortie for food.

The letters about Gaidar which the military commission of the Union of Soviet Writers received are of great interest.

"...There was no better, more reliable or more active man in times of difficulty than he," wrote Colonel Orlov who was one of the last to see Gaidar. "He was honest, courageous and great-hearted."

There are two Heroes of the Soviet Union amongst Soviet writers—the Kazakh critic and historian of literature Malik Habdullin and the young Ukrainian writer Borzenko.

In a speech at a plenary meeting of the Union of Soviet Writers, Borzenko related a number of outstanding frontline episodes in which he had been engaged as both soldier and journalist. As war correspondent he was attached to the army which stormed Novorossiisk, occupied a number of other inhabited places and then captured Taman. Later, when faced with the difficult task of forcing the Kerch Straits to obtain a foothold on the Crimean coast, the editor of the army newspaper sent for Borzenko and said:

"You will take part in the landing operations and describe them for the newspaper."

Let us see what Borzenko's own laconic account of the operation has to say:

"The division which was to undertake this extremely difficult operation was concentrated at Taman. A storm which lasted four days destroyed part of the fleet of boats and a strong wind continued to blow. Although some of the vessels had been sunk the order was given to embark. We went aboard at midnight but there were not enough vessels. After every motorboat had taken forty five men on board, another fifteen were added to each. "Go slow," said the petty officer in charge, "or you'll swamp the boats!" The waves poured over the sides and we had to bale out with our caps.

"We had been five hours at sea when searchlights flashed out from the German-held Crimean coast and our craft were spotted. The Germans opened fire but at that moment came a thunderous roar: tens of thousands of shells flew over our heads rending the air. This was our artillery putting down a barrage to give the marines an opportunity to effect a landing. The shells set fire to a number of buildings and haystacks on the opposite coast which served as a guide for our approach. The Germans further lit up the way for us with dozens of searchlights and hundreds of rockets and in their bluish light we made out the coastline. Everybody wanted to get a better view of the place where we should have to fight. The coast seemed close at hand but very high and we wondered how we should be able to fight there; we could be killed ten times over while landing.

"I was with Nikolai Belyakov's battalion which was to be first ashore; after us came the regiment and then the whole division. According to the time-table my boat was to be the third to land; shells set fire to the first two boats and we made full speed for the shore. A shell hit our boat, landing in the engine which caught fire, singeing the men's hair and eyebrows. Those behind stretched out their hands towards the fire to warm them up for the journey had been bitterly cold. Then a stream of bullets from a heavy machine-gun hit the boat.

"We eventually reached land and disembarked. Right ahead of us lay the concrete pillbox from which the heavy machine-gun was firing. Belyakov landed just behind me and was struck by anti-tank grenades. I continued to advance, the marines following. We lay flat with barbed wire just ahead. A searchlight sought us out and when the marines saw my major's insignia they turned to me for leadership. I told them to cut the wire. The marines answered that it was mined. 'Right-o, then we'll go up with the mines,' and I went on ahead toward the wire.

"Suddenly, in the rays of a searchlight I saw some girl or another whirling round in an unbelievable dance. 'Forward! Forward!' she cried. 'See, I'm dancing right here where there are no mines!' I ordered the men to the right where large numbers of shells began to burst. At least 200 guns were firing at us and at that moment

when the searchlights were picking us out from all sides, our bombers sailed overhead and dive-bombed the searchlights putting many of them out of action. To our right I noticed some houses and decided to make for these as we would suffer fewer losses from the gun-fire behind their walls and stones.

"When we entered the village the Germans greeted us with a hurricane of machine- and tommy-gun fire from roofs, attics and cellars. We soon cleared them out, however, and as it began to get light I remembered I had to let my readers on the Taman Peninsula know that we had landed in the Crimea and established a beachhead. I had a runner with me, a ten-year-old boy named Vanya Sidorenko, and we entered the first house we saw. There I hurriedly wrote my account. I wrapped my first story from the Crimea in a piece of anti-gas cloak so that it would not get wet, took the runner down to the beach,

put him aboard a motor-boat and ran back to the battle."

Borzenko remained there until the end of the operation; he was with his unit when they captured a number of mounds and hills and repulsed the attacks of German tommy-gunners, tanks and Ferdinands and he took part in hand-to-hand fighting. In describing these episodes, Borzenko always ended up: "And then I sat down to write my next report."

Borzenko has matured as an author during the war. He has evolved his own style and promises to become a brilliant novelist.

Borzenko's vivid personality typifies, in general, the figure of the soldier-writer. It is their voice that is heard in Vishnevsky's words which delight the wartime writer: "You threw yourself into life,—into battle,—you did everything that was necessary."

LYDIA BAT

NEW BOOKS

Alexei Surkov's new book, "Russia Avenging" carries the subtitle "Verses. 1943". There was no need to have put this subtitle on the cover of the book—the imprint of times is felt in every verse, burns in every line of it.

Surkov is a poet who seeks for direct and comprehensive communion with his reader. The verses collected in this book had previously appeared in the pages of the daily press. They were a vital response to events and formed a kind of calendar in verse whose appeal lay in its author's warm sincerity. Such lines are called "newspaper verses," a name indicating their essentially topical nature. With different authors they have a different character, but Surkov's "newspaper verses" go beyond what the name would suggest and, collected in one book, they become a significant event in the world of letters, a dynamic and effective weapon of struggle against the enemy. Both in age and experience Surkov is a poet of long standing but his poetry has the joyous ring of youth and withal, the mellowness of maturity. From book to book the poet's voice grows more definite and specific. His lines have their own specific quality; there is no need to look for the signature to recognize the author.

The leitmotif of Surkov's "Russia Avenging" is hatred of the enemy. The landscapes in this book are uniform—devastated villages, felled woods, demolished cities. All this is the handiwork of the Germans—the age-old foe of the Russians. This, indeed, was the picture our Motherland presented as, marching ever westward, we expelled the foe from our native country. Grief has ravaged the heart of Russia, and gives no peace or respite to her fighting sons. Many of Surkov's verses have the biting reality of an eyewitness report, others are like frontline dispatches by a war correspondent. The genre of war correspondence in verse was born during

this war. It is regularly featured in the pages of Red Army newspapers. Being closely bound up with the army it was natural for Surkov to assimilate and further this genre, enriching it with his own experience as an old soldier.

Like all good verses, Surkov's book can be read again and again with increasing pleasure. Turning over the small pages of this book shows that the verses are uneven in significance and quality. Some have been dashed off hastily; usually they carry in small print at the end the name of some little town or village, familiar from the communiqués of the Soviet Information Bureau. These are vivid sketches from nature, and as such they will live on in poetry, as a memento of a poet's work at the front.

To this group belongs the poem "Life Returns," in which Surkov describes a town during the first hours after its liberation. These lines give an inimitable picture as distinct as a pencil sketch. The poet will probably return to this theme later, and his first rough sketch will unquestionably help him in making a sweeping canvas of this subject.

Incidentally it is to be noticed that major works are not Surkov's forte. The poet excels in short, concise poems or songs, and it is in this genre that he is known and highly appreciated.

The lyrical hero of his verses has not changed. He is the same as in the poet's first book "Song Melody"—the plain Russian with the heart of a soldier. Maybe slightly more austere, but with feelings all the deeper and finer because of this.

"Russia Avenging" is a vital record of the great offensive of 1943, a memorial to the days of the liberation of our native soil.

The most renowned name in Russian poetry of the XVIII century was that of Derzhavin. The following epoch, marked by the triumph of realism and ringing with the genius of Pushkin, Lermontov and Nek-

rasov, well-nigh consigned to oblivion this idol of the days of Catherine. But the further Derzhavin's times recede into the past, the more clearly defined grow the abiding features of his remarkable talent.

Derzhavin was not only a representative of a definite period in Russian literature, not only a writer to whom poets of subsequent generations were much indebted, he was also one of the most outstanding of Russian poets. It was quite justifiable that Maxim Gorky, having decided to publish a "Library of the Poets," in which he contemplated collecting the best treasures of Russian poetry, should devote the first issue in this series to Derzhavin. And it was equally appropriate that a year ago the Soviet Union should widely mark the bicentenary of the birth of this poet.

A convincing and truthful portrait of Derzhavin is given in a small book issued by the State Literary Publishing House and written by Professor Dmitri Blagoy—a specialist in XVIII century Russian literature.

Everything about this man was original and on a generous, sweeping scale, beginning with his colourful life story with its many ups and downs. Son of a small landowner, he began his career in the soldiers' barracks of the Preobrazhensky Regiment and ended it in the palace chambers of the Empress, as senator and minister. He combined genuine Russian breadth of scope with a fiery temperament, simplicity and artless cunning.

A true son of his age, pompous and naive, barbarous and exquisite, he was fascinated by the glamorous magnificence of Catherine's reign, that golden period in the history of the sovereignty of the Russian nobility. Sharing in the prejudices of his milieu, he was far from the progressive revolutionary ideas for which his remarkable contemporary, Radishchev, fought and sacrificed his life. And still, the liberative ideas of the Enlightenment, its singular national democratism, left its mark on all the activities of Derzhavin.

In his glorification of "Felice" (as he named Catherine II in his verses) there is none of the servility and obsequiousness of the royal court ode-writer; his lines are dictated by progressive humanistic aims and often abound in sharp attacks against the arbitrary acts of the omnipotent nobles. His strikingly forceful artistic adaptation of David's psalm LXXXII was regarded by contemporaries as a "Jacobin poem" and to this very day stands as a vivid example of denunciatory pathos. It was natural for the poet Ryleyev—the head of the "Decembrists"—to revere Derzhavin as poet and citizen, and to uphold his traditions in his own writings.

Blagoy's book offers a thoughtful and striking picture of Derzhavin's singular talent, uneven, and at times even rugged, but compelling in its elemental force, vigorous, bold and free. Fostered in the traditions of Russian classicism, Derzhavin was one of the first to break the classicist canons thus paying the way for the future generation of romanticists and real-

ists. He softened the lines of demarcation between genres and introduced into rhetorical declamation the vital tones of the individual human voice and, what is most important, gave access into poetry to the hitherto banned world of concrete things and phenomena. In what Blagoy defines as Derzhavin's "sensualism," in the art of reproducing everything visible, tangible and audible in all the Flemish luxury of poetic still lifes, Derzhavin hardly has his equal to this day.

The concluding chapter of Blagoy's book describes Derzhavin as "singer of Russian glory." Paean in honour of the military victories of the Russian state were sung by all ode-writers of the XVIII century. But in Derzhavin's verses it is not the official exaltation of the court poet which is heard, it is the voice of genuine national patriotism, the patriotism of the people. Behind his pictures of battle triumphs, behind the figure of the great Russian military leader Suvorov, arises the vision of the mighty people, proud in the knowledge of its invincibility. And it is by virtue of this that Derzhavin seems to be so closely akin to the mood of Russian society in the Great Patriotic War of the present day.

The translation of verses into another language has always presented very difficult problems in literature, and knows of more failures than successes. Quite often preference has to be given to translations in which the translator, without attempting to create an adequate work, forgoes certain aspects of the original in order to convey at least some of its other features. The extent of the sacrifices which the translator has to make depends inversely on the force of his talent.

Still, since the days of Zhukovsky and Pushkin, Russian poets have frequently been attracted by this alluring task and entered into the lists with the geniuses of other countries, creating masterpieces of translation which to this day embellish Russian poetry.

Samuel Marshak's translations from the English poets recently issued in a new edition, supplemented with a number of hitherto unpublished works, mark an outstanding achievement in the art of translation by Soviet poets. This collected volume covers an especially wide field, ranging from the XV century ballads to Rudyard Kipling.

Marshak is one of the best Russian judges of English poetry and his choice of works is as a rule marked by strict and exacting taste. He is not aiming at an anthology of English poetry nor at compiling a comprehensive or systematic collection. He translates only what "runs from his pen," and is very slow to publish his works, doing so only when he is sure that he has succeeded in his attempt.

This new volume gives most space to translations of Robert Burns. Burns has been quite often translated in Russian before; many good translations were made by Mikhailov in the middle of the XIX century. In our days brilliant translations of Burns were made by the poet Edward

Bagritsky (1895—1934). The solid merits of Marshak's translations can well stand comparison with his predecessors. He especially excels in the translation of Burns' short song-romances.

Before Marshak there was scarcely anyone who could so faithfully convey in Russian the peculiar twilight effect of English ballads. Marshak achieved particular success in his translations of such ballad verses as Blake's "Gwyn, King of Norway" and Stevenson's "Heather Ale."

This small volume also includes translations of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley and Yates. Special mention should be made of his fine translations of English nursery rhymes—nothing surprising in view of the fact that Samuel Marshak is one of the most popular children's poets in Soviet Russia.

Franz Weiskopf's novel "Dawn Breaks," first published in English, and now in a Russian translation by the State Literary Publishing House, is of particular interest today, dealing as it does with the fight of the Slovakian people against the German invaders and their collaborators from among the local Quislings.

With sparing, and thus all the more expressive, strokes of his brush, Weiskopf gives a truthful and compellingly simple picture. The whole people, from great to small, meet the violators with irreconcilable hatred. Everyone contributes his share to this struggle against the invaders, from the young boy Yoshko, who sets fire to the cartload of hay requisitioned by the Germans, to eighty-six-year-old Grandpa Dano Ligat, who with his own feeble hands kills one of the traitors serving the Germans.

This struggle is waged not only through the self-sacrificing work of the underground organizations and the heroic actions of the partisans: with equal force it makes itself felt in the minor things of daily life, taking forms as diverse as life itself.

A striking example of the resourcefulness of Czech and Slovak patriots can be gleaned from the story told by one of the characters of this book—a captain of the S. S. troops. It tells us about howitzer barrels made at a war factory, which always prove to be substandard. After many months of fruitless spying, the Gestapo men at last learn the secret:

"And, gentlemen," says the S. S. officer, "do you know how they had contrived the whole business? Simple to the point of genius. You know that the workers now have their lunch right in the shop, ever since the lunch hour was abolished. Well, they sit around near their machines and whenever they drink their beer, they just blow some of the froth down the white-hot gun barrels. It was child's play. It leaves no trace but the barrel is never the same again. The steel cools unevenly, and unevenly cooled steel cannot withstand the stresses set up by the expanded gases at every shot."

The Germans, of course, had one answer to all this: brutal tortures, the concentra-

tion camp and the firing squad. The wholesale nature of these reprisals was, in essence, aimed at exterminating a whole people. And the systematic plundering of the country followed the same end. The invaders left not a single grain in the barns of Slovakia, and even the newly-hatched chicks were included in the list of livestock due to be requisitioned.

The author draws vivid portraits of those who enact the policy of plunder in the enemy-invaded country. They are people of different ages, callings and past history—but they all believe the world is doomed to be a victim of the Germans, and that the German domination must be cemented by sword and blood. And the difference, say, between the Gestapo man Degenfeld and the ex-student, Oberleutnant Köster, is that one considers it quite a simple thing to trample with hobnailed boots on foreign lands and exterminate whole nations, and the other seeks to vindicate it by considerations of "supreme justice" which, for him, coincides with the principles of... Hitler's "new order." It would be hard to say which of the two is the more base...

The patriots of the enslaved countries understand this and can draw conclusions therefrom. The novel describes a little scene which is a striking illustration of this point. The Germans are shooting a young worker for sabotage. "When Jan was asked if he had a final request, he said yes, he'd like to stretch himself one last time, would they please loosen the handcuffs. They did so. Jan stood there for a moment, his arms extended, and then he suddenly knocked in the teeth of the nearest black-coat. They instantly started shooting—all of them together, pell-mell, at a distance of five or six paces, like savages. They kept on pumping bullets into his body, even after he was dead."

And the person to whom this was being told, remarked:

"I rather think he meant that to be a symbol not only for himself, but also for the prisoners and for the nazis also. And surely for us too. A signal that this war is a fight to the death—that's the only sentiment possible towards the enemy."

And in this war to the death a base and pitiful role, in every respect, is played by the German collaborators of the Quisling ilk. The Germans treat them outright as mere lackeys, and their own people hate and despise these traitors. This is eloquently described in the concluding pages of the book, telling of the partisans' attack on the German staff. A traitor, who declares he wanted to make things easier for his people, is one of the first to fall, struck down by a Slovak bullet.

Traitors "from amongst their own people" had just as little success as the Germans in their attempts to deceive or pacify the Slovaks. The Slovak people never ceased their fight for a single moment, and this fight is being waged with redoubled energy today, when the people of Slovakia already hear the thunder of Soviet guns.



Still from the film

"AT 6 P.M. AFTER THE WAR"

This is the first Soviet film to touch on problems of the post-war period. Fighting is still raging, the battlefields are drenched with blood—the date of the end of a struggle unparalleled in history for the independence and happiness of freedom-loving mankind is still in the melting pot. But behind the reek of conflagrations, beyond the wreckage and ruins of demolished cities and burnt-out villages looms the joyous day of the long-awaited victory. Millions of hearts beat hopefully in anticipation of meeting their loved ones.

In "At 6 p.m. After the War" the poet Victor Gussev and producer Ivan Pyryev convey to men the first tidings of peace, the dream of that wonderful day reflected on the screen.

In the final shots we see the Moscow Kremlin illuminated by fireworks soaring skywards... Endless vistas of streets and squares gleam with electric lights... The stars of the Kremlin, free of their blackout, all ablaze. And against the festive background of light and music, the men and women of Moscow, symbolizing the multi-millioned population of their boundless land, embrace each other, their hands full of flowers... Perhaps they are selfish in abandoning themselves so complete-

ly to their own joy—forgetful of those who will never again meet their loved ones; who will never again see the sweethearts or husbands who, by laying down their lives, have made possible this moment of infinite happiness. Tomorrow they will reverently bow their heads before the memory of the fallen, before the grief of the widowed and the bereaved. Today, however, they are full of their own emotions, their own joys. Dare we judge them? Have not they, too, approached this hour of happiness along paths of trial and agony, gaining felicity through courage and heroism?

The principal characters of the film are artillery Lieutenant Kudryashov and Varya, a young teacher at a Children's Home. The peculiar manner of their first meeting is characteristic of wartime. Among a multitude of parcels addressed to nameless heroes—defenders of their country—among these touching marks of attention dispatched to the front is a wooden case covered with naive drawings such as children love to make. The regiment commander delegates this original parcel to two friends, Lieutenants Kudryashov and Demidov who have shown up well in battle. It is found to contain warm socks.

and underwear, some chocolate and a bottle of brandy, sent to unknown addressees by the inmates of a Children's Home. Enclosed is a photograph—a group of youngsters surrounding "Auntie Varya," the charming young teacher. The children and Auntie Varya invite the recipients of the parcel to pay them a visit when they come to Moscow. One need be neither playwright nor poet to divine what course events will now take, so realistically does the plot open. How many other acquaintances have begun in just this same way during the war! How many friendships have blossomed forth from such chance beginnings!...

The lieutenants arrive in Moscow to receive fighting decorations. They seek out Auntie Varya who in real life proves to be even more fascinating than in her photo. In the pure and cordial relations that spring up between the officers and the young girl there is no touch of triteness, no suspicion of light flirtation. When he sees that Varya prefers Kudryashov, the second Lieutenant Demidov selflessly withdraws: friendship at the frontlines teaches men to sacrifice their lives, let alone their loves. But fate is kind. Demidov is not doomed to loneliness. An acquaintance with Varya's girl-friend, Fenya, matures into a strong, mutual affection.

Before they return to their regiments the friends propose to the two girls, and plans are made to meet again in Moscow, on Moskvoretsky Bridge near the Kremlin, at 6 p.m. after the war. This arrangement is no invention of the author's. Men and girls bidding each other farewell in wartime have sometimes jokingly, and sometimes in earnest, made just such a promise.

The parting between Varya and Kudryashov and their true love when separated are presented with lyrical tenderness and true sentiment. Kudryashov battles against the hated enemy; Varya, along with thousands of other Moscow girls, digs anti-tank pits and erects fortifications at the approaches to the capital. Dividing them is the firing line, a roar with the din of battle; between them rages the hurricane of artillery fire, but in the fields around Moscow the soldier's tender voice rings out in his letter to Varya instilling strength and courage while Varya's voice bearing the same loving message of strength and courage reaches Kudryashov at the front in her reply.

Kudryashov is wounded and evacuated to the rear. His leg is amputated. A tragic note breaks into the tale of happy love. Kudryashov regards himself as a cripple, of no use to anybody—mere jet-sam, to be thrown overboard. His love is unchanged. But what right has he to burden the life of the woman he loves with the care of an invalid?

This is one of the burning problems entailed by the war. No wonder that it has recently drawn the attention of many writers who have dealt with it in stories and narratives. A new tale by Wanda

Wasilewska entitled "Just Love" and published in our magazine is devoted to the same subject. And we find this same problem figuring in the scenario by Victor Gussev and the producer, Ivan Pyryev. Each writer solves the situation in his own way and the one presented in "At 6 p.m. After the War" seems to us true to life and fully in keeping with the moral principles governing the relations of sweethearts and married couples in Soviet society.

In a fit of despair Kudryashov decides to remove himself from Varya's path. He asks of his friend one last favour—to tell his fiancée that he, Kudryashov, has perished. In vain Demidov tries to persuade Kudryashov that he errs but the latter is adamant, deaf to all argument. Demidov finds himself compelled to tell Varya a falsehood....

With loving intuition the girl refuses to believe that her lover is dead and forces Demidov to confess the truth. Together they repair to Kudryashov's apartment, but too late! He has already left Moscow leaving no address, only a letter for his friend. He still loves Varya, he writes, and begs Demidov not to desert her in her hour of sorrow. They seek for him in vain: Kudryashov seems to have vanished off the face of the earth. Varya, however, refuses to lose hope and awaits his return. Like many other Soviet girls she volunteers for the Red Army. At a frontline wayside station the girls of an AA squad meet a train conveying artillery-men. The commander, leaning on a stick, limps along the platform. Varya recognizes him as Kudryashov.

Through the mist that despite your efforts gathers before your eyes, you see Varya rush towards her fiancé, and Kudryashov, limping on an artificial leg, almost running to meet her. The minutes of their meeting are numbered. The trains move off. Once more their paths diverge and once more before this second parting the two arrange a meeting in Moscow at 6 p.m. after the war.

Their trials do not end here. The train carrying the AA team is raided by fascist vultures. Varya is wounded. The spectators again await in great trepidation....

...The war is over. The great clock on the Spassky Tower in the Kremlin has struck its melodious chimes six times... Dozens of loving reunions have taken place. Demidov and Fenya have met. The bridge is deserted. Kudryashov is seen pacing up and down. He is alone. Nervously he smokes one cigarette after another. And when the highest pitch of tension has been reached, when it would seem useless, senseless to wait any longer, Varya, clasping a great armful of lilac, radiantly happy, with face aglow throws herself into his arms.

Pyryev calls the picture "At 6 p.m. After the War" a musical-poetical film. It is a daring innovation in cinema genre. The dialogue is in verse, now approaching the prose of everyday life, now filled with a

lyrical strain. When verse can no longer convey the thrill of emotion the lines are sung. And the spectator hardly notices these transitions from verse to song, so natural are they, prompted by the intrinsic nature of the style adopted. The convention of versification merges with the lyrical mode of acting and the colourfulness of the sequences. The film is true to life but men and surroundings are presented not from the angle of a chronicle but seen with the eyes of a poet for whom the feelings and inner consciousness of his characters are of greater importance than the precision of photography.

The originator of this genre in Soviet drama was the young poet, Victor Gussev, author of numerous popular songs and plays in verse: "Glory," "Spring in Moscow," "Moscow Girl," "Sons of Three Rivers" and others. It was this poet, who, collaborating with Ivan Pyryev, introduced this new film mode in their first joint production, "The Swineherdess and the Shepherd." To our profound grief we must speak of Victor Gussev in the past, for the poet died several months ago from heart trouble, carrying with him to the grave songs still unsung and unrealized creative conceptions. The producer of the new film has solicitously preserved his poet-friend's last scenario.

Ivan Pyryev belongs to the young generation of Russian cinema producers. Working on his own for a matter of only ten years or so, he has nevertheless gained great popularity in this comparatively short space of time. A bold creativeness and a spirit of innovation are conspicuous in all his efforts. Every new film blazes a trail in art and introduces some novel genre. Boldly experimental were his musical film-comedies based on contemporary village life, "The Rich Bride Elect" and "Tractor-Drivers" (1937-1939). Pyryev was the first in cinema circles to grasp the complex processes operating in economic and personal relations in the Soviet village. With true artistic insight he grasped all the richness of collectivization and depicted in vivid colours the happy pre-war existence of the peasantry. Another of his bold experiments in the domain of the new musical-poetical film was "The Swineherdess and the Shepherd" in which the theme of collective farm life was further developed. It was left to Pyryev to poetize ultra-prosaic professions and endow swineherd and shepherd with the traits of a modern Romeo and Juliet of a Soviet village.

Pyryev's talent is indeed versatile. The film-comedy is not his only genre. It was he who in 1942 staged "The Partisans," the first important film in the U.S.S.R. dealing with the partisan struggle against the fascists. His work is highly appreciated and this artist is the only film producer to thrice receive a Stalin Prize. They were awarded for "Tractor-Drivers," "The Swineherdess and the Shepherd" and "The Partisans."

His pictures have a way of striking



Varya, played by Marina Ladynina

nome. The characters are easily comprehensible and closely akin to the people—instinct with living warmth and sincerity. The artist expresses the thoughts and feelings actuating the whole country, and of this unity "At 6 p.m. After the War" is particularly illustrative.

The principal roles are taken by the well-known artists Marina Ladynina, Eugene Samoylov and Ivan Lyubeznov, a splendid ensemble, yet each displaying a sparkling individuality.

In Ladynina, dramatic talent is combined with fine vocal qualities. Her songs are deeply expressive conveying all the delicate shades of sentiment.

Eugene Samoylov became popular with the public when starring in Alexander Dovzhenko's "Shchors," during the war he scored a great success in "Elusive Jan," a joint production by Vladimir Petrov and Isidore Annensky. The character he has now created, that of a Soviet artillery officer, presents a new and clear-cut figure. Samoylov has a charming smile, expressive eyes and wins your sympathies with the breadth of the Russian personality, now revealing itself in a tender purity of love, now in fighting valour, now during a tragic crisis.

Ivan Lyubeznov as Lieutenant Demidov displays a gift of spontaneous comedy, lightness and gaiety of intonation, contrasting with, yet complementing Lieutenant Kudryashov (Eugene Samoylov).

Deserving of mention is the work of film-operator Valentina Pavlov, who attains good effect in forceful shots and extensive frontline panorama. The views of Moscow are most picturesque. Director Fyodor Krasny and operator Boris Aretsky have made some outstanding combined shots

creating a complete illusion of Moscow during a night air-raid and of an air-combat between a women's anti-aircraft detachment and fascist planes. The fairy-like spectacle of post-war Moscow celebrating victory bears convincing evidence to their skill.

The music of Tikhon Khrennikov deserves special mention. In 1942 this composer's First Symphony was performed with great success in the U.S.A. His music to Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing" has caught on marvelously, the Claudio serenade being hummed and whistled everywhere with other very popular songs.

His music to "Don Quixote" ably conveys the spirit and atmosphere of the tragic-comical adventures of the knight of the mournful countenance. Belonging to his pen are numerous musical sketches, popular songs and incidental music to several films, including "The Swineherdess and the Shepherd" and "At 6 p.m. After the War."

This new film is undoubtedly a production of consummate skill, a picture coming straight from the heart of the authors and readily finding its way to the hearts of the audience.

OLEG LEONIDOV

ALEXANDER SEROV, CRITIC AND COMPOSER

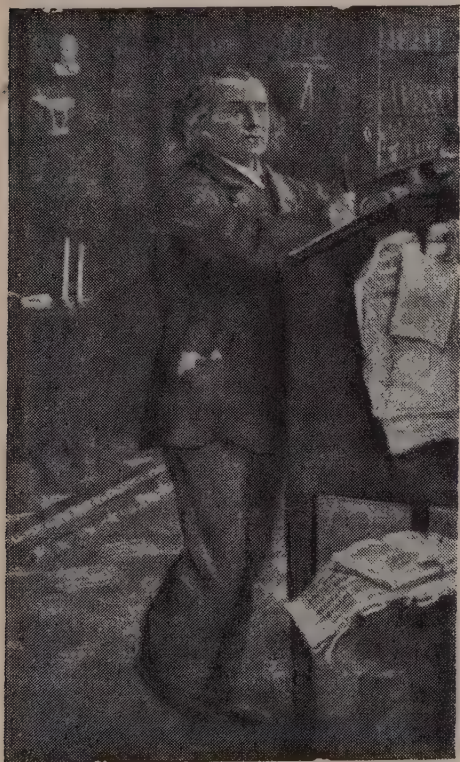
It would be difficult to imagine the history of Russian literature and, indeed, of Russian art generally, without Visarion Belinsky, Nicolas Chernyshevsky, Nicholas Dobrolyubov; or the history of Russian painting and music without Vladimir Stassov. Advanced critical thought of the XIX century blazed the path for the creators of art fighting for progressive social ideas, enlightening the minds of artists and fostering the public's aesthetic taste. It affirmed the lofty significance of art in life and culture and in strengthening national consciousness. It exposed

ignorance and soul-deadening routine and reaction.

Among the galaxy of such fighters was Alexander Serov, a brilliant critic and publicist, scholar, lecturer and composer. In the person of Serov, XIX century Russia produced a musician of outstanding calibre. As a composer, Serov cannot be said to have occupied one of the first places—that falls to the lot of the few—but he marched in the forward ranks, advancing fearlessly along the path of his own creation. He unquestionably was the most outstanding musical critic and historian—the initiator of professional musical criticism in Russia—a classic of Russian musical ideology. Regarding musical criticism, only Stassov was his equal. In the sphere of creative music, in opera—Serov is a personality of considerable magnitude. Serov's operas are a connecting link between the works of his great predecessors Glinka and Dargomyzhsky, and the operas of subsequent masters—Chaikovsky and "the Five" of the famous Balakirev circle.

Serov's activities covered the twenty years between 1851 and 1871, and the place of his labours was St. Petersburg. It was here that Alexander Serov was born one hundred and twenty-five years ago (January 23rd, 1820).

Till the age of ten he was educated at home and then entered a public school. Then came five years at the School of Law, Serov's career as an official under the Ministry of Justice began in 1840. For five years he was employed in St. Petersburg and later in the provinces—Simferopol and Pskov, with repeated visits in between to his native city. In 1849 he left government service, but five more years passed before he settled down, this time for good, in St. Petersburg. As far back as 1851, while visiting the capital, he began his activities in musical literature, and the first reviews and essays signed "Serov" appeared in several periodicals. The same year an aria from the opera "May Night" was performed at a concert of serious music in the capital, the composer holding the baton for the first time. It was not till ten years later, however, that Serov composed the music for "Judith" that won



Alexander Serov, a portrait by Valentine Serov

him recognition. This was the first of the three operas which occupied the last ten years of Serov's life without, however, interrupting his energetic activities as writer of learned journalistic works. He also wrote choral and incidental music, adapted folk-songs, and continued delivering lectures on the history and theory of music. These lectures were a new departure at that time, being introduced by him as far back as 1858. In 1867 we find him embarking on the publication of "Music and the Theatre," a journal which, however, only existed for one year.

The "Judith" première in 1863 was an outstanding success and inspired the composer to further efforts. Two years later "Rogneda" was produced, which earned even more applause. Serov's last opera "Powers of Evil" saw the light three months after the composer's death, which occurred on February 1st, 1871, at St. Petersburg.

Among the important events in his life, his six journeys abroad should not be forgotten (he visited Germany, Czechia, Austria, Switzerland and Italy). Serov contracted a close friendship with Wagner, stayed at the home of Liszt whose acquaintance he had made during the latter's sojourn in Russia, had meetings with Meyerbeer and Berlioz and held close contact with the European musical world of the day. It was during his visit to Vienna towards the end of 1870 that the last event of importance in his life occurred. In his capacity as delegate of the Russian Musical Society he attended the festivities held at Vienna on the occasion of the centenary of Beethoven's birth. On his return to St. Petersburg he arranged there a similar Beethoven memorial celebration with a performance of the Second Mass—a monumental work by the composer whose genius Serov revered throughout his whole life.

Such are the landmarks in Serov's life, permeated with a poignant and, at times, a tumultuous struggle. At first he strove for the right and possibility to devote himself wholly to music, to make it his profession and his only aim in life. Serov was faced by several handicaps before emerging victorious from this hard combat. For one thing there was the versatility of his own tastes which made him doubt his real vocation. Then there was the determined opposition of his father who held the musical profession in no great esteem. The father was an important official free-thinker and well educated, but a harsh despot. And finally when the composer abandoned his career as official, he found himself in straightened circumstances which were to make themselves felt for many years indeed, until the success of "Judith".

It meant, furthermore, the clash of his aesthetic ideals against a host of adversaries, some mere, insignificant quilldrivers, and other more serious authors, men of Serov's own stamp in point of general principles, in the fight for real art, for

its realism, national folk characteristics, for workmanship. This community of aims needs to be stressed but dissensions there were around a number of aesthetic principles.

It was a peculiar struggle waged by an artist for his own art, since although the public and most of the critics immediately appreciated and welcomed Serov's operas, yet some musicians maintained an attitude of reserve and critical judgement which could not but wound the self-esteem of a composer always acutely susceptible to criticism.

Into these polemics Serov put all the passionate fervour of his nature, all his zeal, all the brilliance and finesse of his mind, all his strength of conviction, all his implacability. And withal he revealed in his reviews and newspaper articles, in pamphlets and essays, no less than in his serious investigations and special monographs, substantial erudition, professional scholarship, breadth of outlook and a delicate artistic insight. In addition Serov possessed real literary talent and a gift for popularization. He could, on occasion, in the heat and ardour of controversy fall into extremes and exaggeration. But it was not by these exuberancies of enthusiasm that the trend of his works was determined.

Serov hated dilettantism in criticism as much as in art itself. While contending for precise thematic analysis, Serov turned the sharp edge of his criticism against the formalism and scholasticism that weakens artistic endeavour, depriving it of its soul, of living emotion, of expressiveness. He inveighs against the Vienna critic Eduard Hanslick, that apostle of formalism in music who maintained that the "truthfulness of musical expressiveness is chimera and absurd delusion". "Never!" was Serov's reply. "Thousand times no! Musical expressiveness and the truthfulness of this language of the soul is one of the fundamental and essential conditions of modern art." "Music is the language of the soul," he writes in another place. "It is the sphere of emotions and varying states of mind, it is the expression in sound of the life of the soul."

Admirable examples of Serov's analysis are to be found in such works as "Thematic Treatment in the Overture to the Opera 'Leonora,'" "Study on Beethoven," "Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Its Structure and Meaning," a study of Glinka's music to the tragedy of "Prince Kholmsky," an analysis of Dargomyzhsky's opera "The Mermaid," of Wagner's "Ring of the Nibelung" and many others.

Serov exposes ignorance, lack of honesty, "puerile technical blunders," he is never abashed by authority. When François-Joseph Fétis, a Brussels music scholar of note, wrote an essay on Glinka which contained factual errors and poor analysis, Serov came forward with a vehement denunciation of the author.

The temperament of a fighter and polemic ardour are qualities which he displayed in all his writings, from his daily reviews

to the fundamental works, such as, for example, his important essay, "Mozart's 'Don Juan' and His Panegyrists." However historically remote in theme, his works never stood aloof from contemporary problems.

And on the other hand Serov approached every question from the historical angle. "In art criticism," he wrote, "we must insist first and foremost on authenticity, based on historic data." In the works of every artist Serov detected the "truest expression of his time." We have an example of Serov's historical criticism in "Spontini and His Music" (1852), where he vividly points out the relation between the music of the author of "The Vestal" and his epoch.

Rarely indeed did European musical criticism of the middle of the XIX century combine as organically as did Serov's essays such a high professional and technical culture with a broad philosophic-aesthetical and historical outlook. Similar writings which did appear came from the pens of outstanding authors such as Schumann or Berlioz.

The remarkable thing is that as a musician Serov was self-taught. He had received his musical education at home. At the School of Jurisprudence he had taken lessons in cello playing, had played in ensembles and orchestras there and had arranged music. But the theory of music, the technique of composition and knowledge of musical literature he mastered as a result of long and stubborn labour. And when in later years a musician once asked him where he had studied, Serov felt himself justified in replying that his school had been "the scores of great masters." Personal intimacy with Glinka, and later with Dargomyzhsky had meant a great deal for his musical education and he had also gained immensely from the deep friendship since his youth with Vladimir Stassov and Vassili Engelhardt, fellow students of his School of Jurisprudence days and themselves friends of Glinka. Engelhardt popularized Glinka's music beyond Russia's border. Later the friends parted company, but intimate association throughout a number of years, common musical pastimes, exchange of views, friendly discussions, extensive correspondence—all these deeply influenced their minds and contributed in no small degree to the formation of their views and tastes.

Each of Serov's letters to Stassov which have been preserved, presents a detailed critical essay. The letters discuss various events in musical life and touch on profound aesthetic problems. Their author, one of the best-educated men of his time, was nurtured on classical Russian philosophy, aesthetics and belles-lettres. He was proficient in five foreign languages and well versed in the attainments of world culture.

Serov's advanced mode of thought was reflected in his attitude to Russian national music. "Who knows," Serov wrote, "but that in the Russian people and in the depths of richly endowed Russian

natures may lie hidden the artistic gifts destined to exceed by far a great deal of what has already appeared in the West, and that is now shining in the radiance of majesty and glory." And he cited the names of the Russian painter Ivanov, author of the picture "Christ Appearing to the People," and that of Glinka, as a pledge of a "magnificent future for Russian art".

Serov believed national culture to be founded on folk art. "Repeating for itself the old Greek myth of Antaeus who remained invincible as long as he stood firm on the earth," he wrote, "Russian art will derive inexhaustible power from the people." Serov's investigations in the sphere of folk music ("Music of South-Russian Song" and "Russian Folk Song as the Subject of Study") have played an important role in the development of Russian and Ukrainian musical ethnography. In his researches Serov paid much attention to folklore (adaptations of Ukrainian songs for chorus, dances set to Ukrainian airs for orchestra, Russian songs in the opera of "Powers of Evil").

Serov's interests both as critic and composer were always focussed on questions of opera art. In his estimation the highest and most genuine type of opera is the musical drama, a synthesis, in which dominates the "sought-for ideal of balance between poetic meaning and the beauty of the musical phrases." An art in which "musical poetry, the psychological aspect of music" is sacrificed to melodrama, outward pomp and meretricious tinsel, is a false art. Between the "truth of expression" and "purely musical melodious beauty" there must exist complete harmony. Such are Serov's principles for which he had firmly stood from the outset of his activities. And when, in later years, having studied the theory and art of Wagner, he convinced himself of how akin these were to his own viewpoint, he became an apologist of Wagner.

In his own operas, particularly in the first two, "Judith" and "Rogneda" (there are no records of his earlier operas, "The Miller's Wife from Marli" and "May Night"), he approached the French "grand opera" with its powerful dramatic effects, decorative spectacular staging and mighty al fresco style of orchestration. Nevertheless, while making use, in his own compositions, of the experience of contemporary drama, Serov displayed a definite independence. This refers pre-eminently to "Judith," the finest of his operas, a work in the epic style, in which—to cite the remark of a critic of our own times—there appears a "Plutarchian sense of the past," "a profound grasp of history through epos and an exceptional insight into the heroics of a majestic antiquity."

"In structure the score of 'Judith' is not unlike the rugged but durable and mighty masonry of the walls and towers of ancient towns, but in the theatrical setting each phrase and image seems to be enlivened with its own meaning. The

action proceeds quietly, but never falters. The characters are picturesque and stand out in bold relief. Their emotional dramatic development is consistent and comprehensive. The figures of Judith and Holofernes, their monologues and dialogues are given with a wonderful, crystal vigour. The oriental colouring is unmistakable, and the atmosphere of the desert seems at times to scorch the face with its hot breath. But this opera above all really presents the element of the heroic—tenacious and dominating. The spirit of a great deed, the absence of a trite operatic love plot, the music permeated with enthusiasm and sensually avid passion, the contrasts of grandeur and slavery, savage wantonness and austere patience—all these characteristics raise and place 'Judith' in the first ranks of Russian operas despite a certain awkwardness in its technique. Its historical importance in any case is unquestionable and great" (Boris Assafyev).

Those who happened to be present at the opera's premiere, even the composer's adversaries, all tell of the extraordinary psychological effect on the listeners of this majestic performance. The audience was captivated and vanquished; an awed hush reigned in the house.

In "Judith", Serov, anticipating the musical folk dramas of Mussorgsky, brings the element of the people into the foreground. The masses are portrayed as an active force. Particularly imposing and vivid are the choruses of Jews in the square of their native town besieged by the enemy.

The central character of the opera is that of the beautiful Jewess, Judith. Devoted love for country lends her courage to perform a deed of supreme valour. This idea of patriotism consistently underlying the opera creates a kinship between Serov's "Judith," Glinka's "Ivan Sussanin" and Borodin's "Prince Igor."

A certain critic recently discussing "Judith" referred to another opera on the same subject written in 1922 by Emil von Reznitchek, a modern German composer. In the German opera "Holofernes," Judith meeting Holofernes and giving herself to him is thrilled by the spiritual and physical superiority of the Assyrian warrior to her own contemporaries. In treacherously killing Holofernes, she kills herself for she is inwardly crushed by his mighty image. Thus Reznitchek, following in the steps of Goebbels, who in 1841 gave a similar interpretation of the character of Judith, tried to belittle the heroine's patriotic fervour.

Such a distortion of the biblical legend, alien to the ancient epos and running counter to advanced, civic ideals of modernity, is hopelessly far from the tenets of Russian art.

In Serov's second opera "Rogneda," the avenger of the destruction of her native town and family is also actuated by a spirit of patriotism. The action of the play takes place during the Kiev epoch of Russian history towards the end of the X century. In "Rogneda," as in the first opera, the choruses are the principal attraction in the determined, austere concentrated and at times harsh tones of their music. The best item is the ever popular ballad sung by Rogneda which so aptly characterizes her courageous nature.

Serov struck a novel note in his opera of "Powers of Evil" which was eventually completed after his death by Nicholas Solovyov in collaboration with Valentina Serova, widow of the composer and herself a musician of no mean ability. This is the first musical drama depicting realistic pictures from the life of a Russian town; scenes from the life of merchants, and of popular open air festivities. The subject of the opera is borrowed from the drama by the great Russian writer, Alexander Ostrovsky, "You Can't Live as You Please."

The opera is original not only in subject, but also in the freshness of its musical expression and its rather unusual structure. The music is founded on town folklore, on melodies of Russian folk songs as modified by town influence (peasant songs are also used). The song serves not only as the source of the melodious intonations of the opera, but is also a factor in its dramatic development. On the basis of the songs arise complicated forms of musical dialogues, ensembles, mass scenes and even orchestral episodes. The representation of the Russian carnival ("maslenitsa") clings to the memory. Here the chorus glorify "maslenitsa" week in the scene at the inn, and particularly striking is the picture of the mass merry-making with the gay booths and the carnival procession. Against the background of these scenes, resplendent in their realism and colouring, is intensified the conflict in the personal drama of the heroes to the tragic denouement. This colourful dynamic picture is one of the finest conceptions of national life and customs in Russian dramatic music. In world art, it is among the most vivid and picturesque conceptions of this style.

A fine, large-size picture of Serov in oil has been made by his son, Valentine Serov, the famous realistic painter. The composer of "Judith" is seen at work in his study, standing at a tall writing-desk. The frank, broad face is instinct with thought; with a firm, clear gaze Serov looks straight ahead—into the future.

BORIS STEINPRESS

NEWS AND VIEWS

A date of considerable interest has been marked by Soviet litterateurs: Nicolas Teleshov, an authority on the life of Moscow literary circles with which his own work has been intimately linked, is celebrating his sixtieth year of active work as an author.

Teleshov's first book appeared in 1884. The truthful tales of the life of settlers, Ural miners, Siberian peasants soon brought the young writer's name to the fore. For guides and consellers he had Anton Chekhov and Maxim Gorky. "You must work," Gorky wrote to Teleshov as far back as 1909. "You've got the necessary talent in your soul... the ability... Work!" Teleshov has faithfully followed Gorky's advice to the present day. In this, his sixtieth year as a man of letters he has issued his sixtieth book "A Writer's Notes"—a colourful sketch of literary Moscow during the years 1860 to 1900.

Nicolas Teleshov is the founder and permanent guide of the Museum of the Moscow Art Theatre. He has collected a large number of rare exhibits reproducing the history of the theatre.

On the occasion of his sixtieth anniversary as a writer he has been decorated with the Order of the Red Banner of Labour.

"We invite you to a festival of children's books. You will hear about many interesting books; writers will be present who will read to you their own verses and stories. An exhibition of books will be on view and some volumes will be presented to you."

Eight thousand Moscow schoolchildren received such an invitation. Four matinées held at one of the largest of the capital's concert halls were devoted to the "Children's Book Day" organized by the State Publishing House of Children's Literature.

This original entertainment proceeded with great gusto—all was noise and animation. The youngsters were greatly interested in the prettily arranged show-cases containing the books; they talked to their favourite writers and listened to their readings. On the stage the pages of their favourite stories came to life,—Serge Mikhalkov's "Circus" and many others. After the concert the delighted young readers received the promised gifts—packages of new interesting books.

A museum has been opened in the Moscow State University, Russia's oldest institution of higher learning. A galaxy of names of men famed throughout the world for their achievements in the sciences and arts are to be found in the lists of the University's alumni speeding over nearly two centuries of its history.

Its lectures have been attended by Alexander Griboyedov, Michael Lermontov, Ivan Turgenev, Anton Chekhov. Educated here were the famous Russian critic Visarion Belinsky, the prominent publicist Alexander Herzen and Nicolas Pirogov, the renowned Russian surgeon.

The museum attached to the University is engaged in collecting material connected with the names of the most distinguished of its former members. Fifteen hundred exhibits are already to hand. Extremely interesting is a rare portrait of the University's founder, Michael Lomonosov, the first Russian scholar. Books have been forwarded from the Library of Lomonosov's friend, Ivan Shuvalov, nobleman and patron of learning during the time of Catherine II. Among these are some rare editions of Voltaire with whom Shuvalov corresponded.

The Leningrad Public Library, named after Saltykov-Shchedrin, is preparing for publication a catalogue of the books in its possession from the private library of Voltaire. This unique collection was acquired in the year 1779 by Catherine II from a niece of Voltaire and brought to Russia. It contains some seven thousand volumes in the French, English, Spanish and Italian. Many of the books bear traces of Voltaire's deep and careful study: with single words underlined, marginal notes, corners of pages turned down, short notes of appreciation pencilled on the title page and so on.

A Department of Poetry has been organized at the Union of Soviet Writers and a committee set up composed of the following poets: Paul Antokolsky, Serguei Vassilyev, Vera Inber, Michael Issakovsky, Vassili Lebedev-Kumach, Ilya Selvinsky, and Stepan Shchipachov.

The writers of Tadzhikistan have renewed their war-interrupted work on an anthology of Tadzhik literature. Russian translations are being made of the classical works of their ancient and modern poets. The work is directed by Adalina Adalis, the Moscow poetess, who besides her translation of Firdoussi, the Tadzhik classical poet, is also studying the writings of modern Tadzhikistan poets.

The seventy-fifth birthday of the eminent scholar, President of the Academy of Sciences of U.S.S.R., Vladimir Komarov was recently celebrated by the Academy of Sciences.

To scientists the world over the name of Academician Komarov is known as one of the greatest investigators of nature. A botanist-specialist, his works in that domain are outstanding in scope and volume. He has collected, studied and described thousands of plant-species, some two hundred of which have never before been specified. The herbarium of the Botanical Institute contains ten thousand labels of plant-names made by his own hand. Comprehensive learning, multifarious observations of nature and profound theoretical knowledge have enabled Komarov to set and brilliantly solve a number of important theoretical problems. Among numerous other scientific publications his "Doctrine of Species in Plants" is an outstanding work summing up the results of long years of investigations and observations. This book, which has earned him a Stalin Prize, is a big contribution to the development of the Darwin theory.

Academician Komarov is an indefatigable geographer and traveller. While still quite young the scientist undertook an expedition to Central Asia where he penetrated the heart of the arid desert of Karakum. Studying the flora of the sub-tropics and tropics, Komarov set off on a long voyage along the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal. Over a number of years he conducted scientific investigations in Kamchatka, Manchuria, Korea and Northern Mongolia. He carried out important work in the Amur Region and the Svanetian Mountains. In his expeditions he never restricted himself solely to matters botanical. Concurrently his fertile brain was intent on wide investigations in natural history and geography.

It is now thirty years since Komarov entered the Academy of Sciences as corresponding member. Since 1920 he has been an Academician and for the last ten years has stood at its head.

His activities as President of the Academy have been extremely fruitful. Independent Academies have been created

under his immediate supervision at Erivan (Armenia), Tbilissi (Georgia) and Tashkent (Uzbekistan) and affiliations of the Academy of Sciences of U.S.S.R. have been opened at Baku, Frunze, Stalinabad and Alma-Ata.

During the war, Academician Komarov, declining the government's proposal that he should take a rest from his strenuous labours, has been heading an important commission to investigate the productive forces of the Urals, a commission of vast importance to the war effort.

Komarov's seventy-fifth birthday was warmly greeted in the world of science. The President of the Academy has been awarded the title of Hero of Socialist Labour,

A new institute dealing with the history of arts has been founded by the Academy of Sciences of U.S.S.R. This organization of a central body to study the history of art aims at promoting Soviet art scholarship.

Questions relating to the history of arts were previously studied in different educational establishments, in associations, at the Moscow Tretyakov Gallery and others. Now all scientific research work on art will be concentrated at this new institute.

The director will be the prominent Soviet artist and connoisseur of Fine Arts, Academician Igor Grabar. His assistant, Academician Boris Assafyev is a scholar of music and a composer. A number of sections have been opened: History of Architecture—headed by Academician Alexei Shchushev; History of Music—Professor Nicolas Garbuzov; History of the Theatre—Professor Alexei Jivelegov, and others.

The results of scientific researches conducted by the Institute will be regularly published in the Academy of Sciences' publications. Among the books already under preparation is a monumental three-volume edition of the history of Russian art from ancient times to our own days. Work is also in progress on collections of material devoted to the creative art of two prominent figures in Russian culture, the painter Ilya Repin and the composer Nicolas Rimsky-Korsakov.

C O N T E N T S

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Address: "International Literature", P. O. Box 527, Moscow
Cable address: Interlit, Moscow